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"Their judgement torn, their reason torn, demented from the holy": Ritual (dis)memberment and staging Euripides' The Bakkhai.

Ronald J. Zank

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A Thesis-Equivalent Project

Presented to the

Department of Theatre

and the

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Theatre

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Ronald J. Zank

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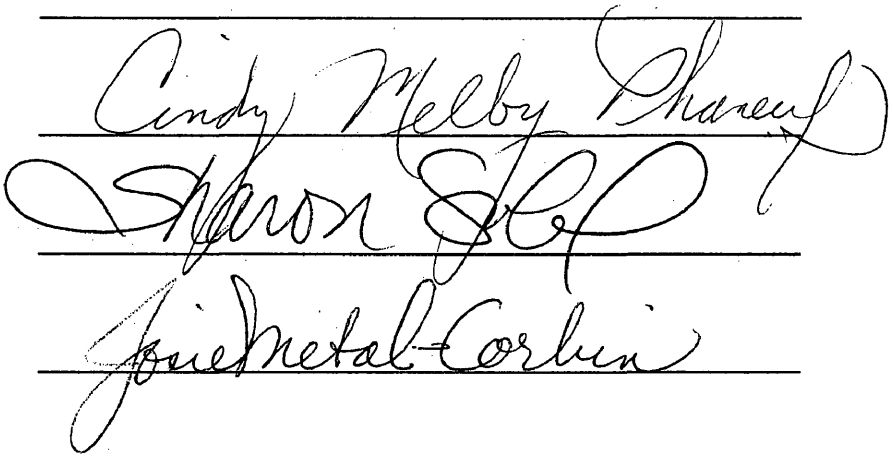

Chairperson

Date July 20, 2006

In memory of my mother Marilyn,
my aunt Joanne and
my great-aunt Helene,
who taught me the power of good storytelling.

And for Beta.

"real gods require blood"

"their judgment torn, their reason torn, demented from the holy": Ritual (Dis)memberment and Staging Euripides' *The Bakkhai*

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University of Nebraska 2006

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This thesis examines key moments in my experience directing Euripides' *The Bakkhai* (as translated by C. K. Williams) in February of 2003 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of my Master of Arts degree in Theatre. It also explores some of the theories and techniques which informed that production.

Chapter One examines my experience as a theatre practitioner and the factors that led to my directing *The Bakkhai*. A close reading of selected moments in Euripides' text make up Chapter Two, which also reviews recent literature, defines key terms and explains the choice of translation. Documented in Chapter Three is the base of critical theory (both literary and performance-based) utilized in approaching the text, including an exploration of Structuralism, Postmodernism and Poststructuralism in reference to Ritual (Dis)memberment. Chapter Four describes how the notion of Ritual (Dis)memberment informed the collaboration between the director, the

production team and the actors, as well as affecting the auditions and the development of the staging. Chapter Five is a reflection on the project, utilizing reviews and personal responses from audience, faculty, friends and students, as well as my own perception of lessons learned and it examines notions for approaching future directing projects, particularly Classical Greek drama.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

The following pages are a brief overview of my thesis project, including how I first encountered Greek drama and specifically discovered *The Bakkhai* and why directing it appealed to me. I examine how I came to directing and graduate school as well as my other considerations for a thesis project. I also explore how my love of musical theatre influenced my approach to *The Bakkhai*, concluding with a summary of the chapters to follow.

FIRST CONTACT

My first exposure to Euripides' *The Bakkhai* was in autumn 2001, as part of Dr. Doug Paterson's Seminar in Dramatic Literature. I had heard of the text before, and read about the Performance Group's adaptation, *Dionysus in '69*, however I had never read the original translated text. The class had already studied *The Oresteia* and the *Oedipus* cycle, so I was expecting much the same: a logical argument, plotted out and formally structured, almost like a television courtroom drama. Instead, Kenneth Cavander's translation demonstrated the dramatic possibilities for a vibrant theatrical experience.

In Euripides' plot, Dionysus, god of wine and revelry, son of the god Zeus and a mortal woman, returns to his birthplace in Thebes seeking vengeance against his mother's sisters and family, who doubted the divine nature and origin of his birth. He whips the Theban women into a frenzy, (including Agave, aunt to Dionysus, mother of the king, Pentheus, and

daughter of Kadmus, the founder of Thebes). Dionysus drives them to cavort in the mountains, dancing, drinking, suckling livestock to their breasts, having sex and wearing animal skins. All of this happens before Euripides' play begins. The early pages of the text depict Dionysus arriving in Thebes with his followers, the Bakkhai, and taking on human form to punish Pentheus (his cousin and the king of Thebes), for denying his godhood and refusing to worship him. The god goads Pentheus into dressing as a woman to spy on the Theban women, but Pentheus is discovered and dismembered when the women, in their delusional frenzy, mistake him for a lion. Agave, his mother, returns to the city bearing the head of Pentheus, proud of her hunting trophy, until her father, Kadmus, causes her to see the horror of her deed. She reassembles the body of Pentheus with her father's assistance. Dionysus appears in godly form to pronounce banishment on Kadmus and Agave, thus completing his revenge and splintering the royal family of Thebes.

Fellow graduate student Sonia Keffer taught the dual-level class when we discussed *The Bakkhai*. Ms. Keffer "staged" the class as a party, with balloons, fruit punch and signs praising Dionysus. Under her guidance we had a Dionysian "bacchanal" while discussing the festive and celebratory aspects of Euripides' text, as well as the contrast of the violent relationships between the Olympian gods and man. The undergraduate students responded positively, caught up in the frenzy, celebration and violence of the work. Unlike

some of the other classical Greek plays we had read, the playfulness of the text seemed appealing and infectious to the class.

Upon my initial reading, several things struck me about *The Bakkhai.* Though written more recently than the highly-structured, verbal debates of the works we had read by Aeschylus and Sophocles, *The Bakkhai* seemed older, action-packed and elemental, almost more a sketch for a ritual than a script to be enacted. I imagined the text only reaching its true potential with dance, and music, or at least percussion. The plot flowed logically, though the style of writing is certainly different than what 21st century audiences are accustomed to experiencing. At the same time, it suggested connections to issues (cult activities, lynch mobs, sports crowds) which still have resonance today.
I began to question, "What is the current equivalent of Greek theatre?"
My impulse toward music and dance made me think of contemporary musical theatre, but I dismissed that idea, for "How would this work as a musical?" is often my default when reading a piece of literature. Reading an ancient text in a 1970s translation, I also inferred homoerotic overtones in the exchanges between Pentheus and Dionysus, and later found my inferences reinforced by recent critics (Bagg 10). The contrast between the two characters reminded me of my undergraduate work in the modern dance technique of Doris Humphrey, whose notion of "Fall and Recovery" drew upon the writings of Nietzsche concerning Apollonian and Dionysian principles. I remembered as well that

Humphrey's creative collaborator, Charles Weidman, had choreographed a piece called "Lynchtown," where one member of a community was sought out and murdered, much like Euripides' play. *The Bakkhai* seemed a passionate and dynamic text, crying out for a dramatic staging that would highlight the unique configuration of the UNO theatre space. While only a few weeks into my graduate studies, I knew I had discovered a possible thesis project.

SEEKING DIRECTION

My arrival at directing was through the back door. In high school I acted and built and painted scenery. At age sixteen I became an aficionado of musical theatre, from *Oklahoma!* to *Hello, Dolly!* and *My Fair Lady*. Being a self-conscious actor, I gravitated toward set design and entered the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, with design as my career goal. During my freshman year, a frustrating (though educational) time in a Technical Theatre class dampened that interest. In addition, I was given the lead in a bare-bones production of Aristophanes' *The Clouds*. Memorizing the large amount of text baffled me and I was saddled with playing two characters. In addition, I was cast opposite an older stage veteran who almost literally mopped the stage with me. There was little rehearsal time and the novice director imposed a *commedia dell'arte* approach, without providing training or context for that style. That knowledge would come later, from other classes, teachers and self-study in the years that followed. At the time, to my 18-year-old self, Greek theatre was "hard,"

"stupid," and "difficult to understand." I left most rehearsals in tears and vowed never to do a Greek play again.

Accustomed to being the big fish in my small high school pond, I shifted my focus to the dance department where I learned ballet, tap, jazz, folk and modern (with a departmental focus on the modern dance technique of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman). Dance appealed to me because unlike theatre, dance was an almost completely new area of study. I had the safety of being a beginner and it gave me a confidence and physical strength I had lacked, as well as a new way of creating images on stage. Although I enjoyed my courses, I realized I had neither the talent nor the drive to succeed as a dancer. It did, however, feed my interest in musical theatre and I began writing lyrics and librettos, both for adapted and original work. To this end, I took English courses in Dramatic Literature, Shakespeare and Poetry Writing, and I even returned to the Theatre Department, where I excelled in playwriting courses, finally graduating with a degree in English.

Following graduation, I was recruited as an Assistant Director and Dramaturg for a production at the Lincoln Community Playhouse. Soon I was serving as an Assistant Stage Manager, Stage Manager or Assistant Director on many musicals and plays. This further developed my director's eye for stage pictures and storytelling. I volunteered my way into a job in the scene shop, building and painting sets and props, supplying research to

directors and designers, eventually designing shows myself and writing scripts for the Playhouse's Children's Theatre.

In 1992, for the first time, I directed a script myself—Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz*. In directing I found an outlet for my strong visual sense, storytelling instincts, and penchant for dynamic movement choices and ironic and entertaining use of music. Following this production, I pursued other directing projects that would welcome similar approaches, from children's theatre and medical dramas to performance art and original one-acts. Along the way I discovered the productions and techniques of Anne Bogart, first as the original director of *The Baltimore Waltz*, and later through reading about her methods for composing in time and space, which she labeled the Viewpoints, Source-work and Composition. Here was a director inspiring and collaborating with actors, drawing from postmodern dance practices and pursuing strong visual and emotional productions without an emphasis solely on realism. While I enjoyed my directing experiments, more training in critical theory, directing and dramatic literature seemed crucial.

I entered the Graduate program in Theatre at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2001. I was exposed to a wide variety of scripts, theorists and forms of scholarship, including Ensemble and Postrealist Acting, Seminars in Ancient, Modern and Contemporary Theatre Aesthetics, and a special seminar in Directing as Adaptation. I was fortunate to experience a wide

range of courses, including the Ensemble Acting Class with Dr. Cindy Melby Phaneuf, which emphasized working with the four elements and archetypes. In addition, I took seminars, an acting class and also stage managed for Dr. Susann Suprenant, who was familiar with Bogart's work and employed her methods in creative projects (as well as exercises of Dr. Suprenant's own design).

When I began searching for a script that would be appropriate for my directing thesis project, I kept several criteria in mind: employing a large cast (since I had only directed works with seven actors at most); incorporating music, percussion and/or dance; finding a text which possessed a mythic or storytelling aspect; and the opportunity to explore postmodern directing techniques like those of Anne Bogart. Euripides' *The Bakkhai* headed a short list that included Karel Capek's Expressionist drama *R.U.R.* (which I also had hoped to translate), Sondheim and Lapine's musical deconstruction of fairytales, *Into the Woods*, and Lanford Wilson's fragmented ensemble sketch of small-town life, *The Rimers of Eldritch*. As the rest of UNO's Theatre Season was assembled, the preponderance of 20th century projects directed by the faculty indicated *The Bakkhai* would be the best choice for me, providing needed variety and serving as an appropriate challenge to the student actors and myself. This was reinforced by my desire to incorporate elements of musical theatre performance, thereby involving students interested in that practice.

As stated before, my love of music theatre began in high school and has

resulted in some of my strongest theatrical memories, from my junior year production of *Oklahoma!* and the national tours of *Hello, Dolly!* and *Ragtime*, to viewing works by John Kelly, Meredith Monk and Rinde Eckart. I have participated as performer, director, librettist, lyricist, assistant director, stage manager, dramaturg, choreographer and designer for a wide range of musicals, operas and music theatre pieces. In addition, I have spent many hours watching performances, listening to recordings and reading criticism in the music theatre arena.

By contrast, my exposure to Greek drama had initially been limited to the page, attending a production of *Lysistrata,* and the aforementioned frustrating production of *The Clouds*. Although as a child I had adored the Greek myths, filled with mythological beasts and daring quests, I had little use for Greek drama, which focused on speaking and reviewing past actions of the characters, with little action. My opinion of the classical canon was radically altered by two visits to the University of Iowa to see adaptations of Aeschylus and Euripides.

In 1999, I drove to see the University of Iowa's production of Charles L. Mee's *Orestes 2.0*, as I knew Mee was a collaborator of Anne Bogart. Mee's method of adaptation is to "shatter" classical texts and overlay fragments of popular culture, from talk show dialogue and radical feminist tracts to transcripts of the Menendez brothers' trial. The production was equally

eclectic, incorporating fashions and cultural detritus from antiquity to the present. It was punctuated by a wide range of musical choices, both live and recorded, from current popular songs, to 1940's standards, to classical works. Watching Clytemnestra rage while speaking lines from the *Home Shopping Network* exploded any stereotypes I may have had about Greek drama.

At another extreme, in November of 2001, the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center presented *Dionysus* in the University of Iowa's E.C. Mabie Theatre. Created and directed by Bogart collaborator Tadashi Suzuki, this *Bakkhai* adaptation utilized traditional Japanese theatre techniques from Kabuki and Noh drama in a contemporary fashion. It was performed in Japanese with projected super titles, with the exception of Agave, who spoke English. The chorus communicated solely through movement, dance and percussion. The dismemberment of Pentheus was a dance with sticks that left the actor sprawled downstage center. It was a breathtaking 83 minutes of theatrical fireworks.

These were productions of Greek plays that left me as excited as any Broadway tour I had ever witnessed. I began reviewing books and articles about other contemporary productions of Greek plays. Rereading dramaturg Jim Lewis' description of working on *The Clytemnestra Project* at the Guthrie, I had new insight:

> We discuss briefly how the plays read a little like the "books" for musicals, clearly missing something without the music and

> dance. We joke that the ancient Greek audiences may well have looked forward to the "big numbers" that broke up the dramatic action of the smaller scenes. (Lewis 20)

When I had read this reference previously, I found the comparison to musicals amusing. Now the conjunction between the two forms seemed apropos and electric. This quote clarified how the use of music and dance in the Iowa productions drew me into the world of Greek drama. Many of the productions I had seen in the past had failed because they lacked these elements and were approached as realistic, "straight" drama. My initial impulse to add music and dance to *The Bakkhai*, to approach it much like a musical, seemed not only correct, but inevitable.

CHALLENGES

The script provided immediate challenges, both generally regarding classical drama, and several specific to *The Bakkhai*. For a contemporary audience accustomed to film depictions of events and realistic portrayals of characters, Greek drama is often a shock. Its focus on intellectual argument and descriptions of offstage action, not to mention choral odes reinforcing ideas through music, verse and dance is often off-putting for those expecting Neil Simon or Tennessee Williams. The challenge for a director, then, becomes how to make an ancient Greek text interesting, relevant and entertaining to a contemporary audience. Given that a university audience is, for the most part,

younger and more accustomed to film and television, it seemed wise to stage the described offstage action, whether through shadow play, dance, or by placing the actors in the theatre balconies to depict the events of the narration. Specific to *The Bakkhai* were challenges such as how to represent the body of Pentheus, which is dismembered by the women of Thebes and reassembled onstage. If too realistic, the depiction would either be laughable or stomach-turning, while I felt a too stylized approach might confuse the audience or undercut the event's impact. The plot also includes an earthquake and lightning striking the palace. So, as Dr. Ruth Hazel asks about the challenge of staging *The Bakkhai*, "How to convey ecstatic or horrific moments . . . without descending into bathos or causing alienation in the audience" (1)? The success of such moments would certainly be influenced by which version of the script was used, the critical approach taken to that script and how it informed the design and rehearsal process.

My initial impulse was to write my own adaptation of the text that would provide clarity, humor and entertainment to a 21st century audience, remove royalty costs and turn selected moments into musical theatre. However, I became concerned there might not be time to write the adaptation. It also seemed unlikely that money would be available to hire a composer. If an existing translation was used instead, choosing which one would best serve our audience, the actors' skill level and my

critical approach from the many translations available seemed to be a huge task.

Any production of Euripides' *The Bakkhai* challenges the director to stage a text rife with contradictions and missing pieces. Understanding the fragmentary nature of Euripides' text seemed critical to staging it. I had a hunch contemporary literary theory and related postmodern directing exercises would provide a "lens" for reading and staging the production, but I was uncertain about how to select the most appropriate ones. Discussions with my then thesis advisor, Dr. Susann Suprenant, led me to focus on the classical Greek concept of *sparagmos*, or ritual dismemberment, where a human or animal is torn apart, later discovered and reassembled. This ancient concept related well to the branch of contemporary theory called deconstruction, in which everything is considered text (words, actors, movement, design, etc.) and the process of making something also infers its perpetual coming apart. This decision raised as many questions as it solved: how would I define those terms for this production? How does fragmentation and ritual dismemberment relate to a 21st century audience? How does postmodern or poststructuralist theory influence the preparation of a text or the selection of rehearsal techniques for an ancient work? Can and should postmodern theory be used on a premodern text? Many theoretical questions had to be answered even as the more pragmatic, hands-on production decisions were being made.

Production decisions loomed very large. Never before had I been in charge of so large a project with so many disparate elements: actors, chorus, percussionists and the panoply of designers and technicians. Even arranging rehearsals to accommodate the material would be difficult. Much had to be decided in a seemingly short time. Casting a classical play raises many questions, as the ancient convention was to use a few actors to play all the roles with distinction provided through the use of masks. Yet university tradition is to provide as many opportunities as possible and masks might be difficult to incorporate given the short rehearsal period. Should the look of the production be ancient or contemporary, realistic or more stylized? Should sound be recorded or actor-generated? How would I make the many choral sections exciting, yet different from each other? My work was certainly cut out for me.

Many texts became essential in understanding and staging the play and are referenced throughout the following chapters. A central touchstone to my own understanding was a focus on the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), as explored in the Ensemble Acting class. While not present in every moment of rehearsal, they became a useful default when approaching this premodern text. Indeed, the elements not only provided inspiration for the rehearsal process but even can be seen as an organizing device for the following chapters.

The earthy basics of text and translation are examined in Chapter Two: "their judgment torn." Three translations of *The Bakkhai*, by Robert Bagg, Paul

Roche and C.K. Williams, were useful for their varied approaches and critical notes. The Introduction to that edition, written by Martha Nussbaum, introduced me to this idea of ritual dismemberment and largely influenced the final choice of the Williams' translation . Nussbaum's approach to the text provided insight into why using an existing translation can be preferable to "forging" a new translation. Geoffrey S. Kirk's literal translation of Euripides' work also formed a good foundation from which to approach the play.

Literary Theory can be heady, even airy, and attempts to contain these critical breezes are highlighted in Chapter Three: "their reason torn," which establishes the theoretical basis for my approach to the production. Gilbert Murray's article, "Euripides' 'Bacchae' and the Ritual Pattern of Tragedy," helped identify and define those ritualistic elements of the text and reinforce its similarity to other myths and even to certain musical theatre plots. Mark Fortier's *Theory/Theatre* provided necessary working definitions of structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, especially in reference to theatrical performance. Amy S. Green's book, *The Revisionist Stage: American Directors Reinvent the Classics*, features other working examples of critical theoretical approaches to theatrical production and demonstrates precedence for postmodern theory applied to premodern texts.

The process of designing staging and rehearsing any production is truly liquid and watery—an attempt to channel, absorb and contain the waves of

creation. Prominent splashes of this are featured in Chapter Four: "demented from the holy." The collection of essays, *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, was integral in staging *The Bakkhai*, in particular the section on Composition by Tina Landau, which describes the use of rehearsals to generate short movement pieces that can be used to stage productions and learn about the text. An additional "fresh water source" was supplied by Jayme Koszyn's article, "Dramaturgy and the Irrational," which addresses the need to balance intellect with instinct when approaching Euripides. There was also extensive use of Susann Suprenant's "Text/Music Substitution" exercise, which provides options for staging action without textual illustration. The modern dance technique of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman filtered through much of the rehearsal process, and Humphrey's "Checklist" for working on new dances provided a way of "panning through" the creative tide to locate the useful bits. Indeed, the "Checklist" provides a framework (dare I say "aqueduct"?) for the entire chapter, as it did through much of the rehearsal cycle. Highlights of these exercises are included in Chapter Four.

The fiery aftermath of reviews and reactions are featured in Chapter Five, "real gods require blood." Included in the "kindling" is the single newspaper review by Warren Francke of the *Daily Nonpareil*, student critiques from instructor Charleen Willoughby's Introduction to Theatre class, and peer reactions. Far from destructive, these flames are a regenerative force,

clearing away debris and allowing for new growth. My own thoughts regarding the production, including changes I might have made, ideas for future projects and approaches to Greek drama, are direct results of this "firing."

Starting from the concept of ritual (dis)memberment, using a variety of postmodern directing techniques, my musical theatre background and my recently gained knowledge of critical theory seemed an apt way to approach this ancient text. Not every moment of the production process can be documented, but prominent moments should provide an overview. This convergence of elements made containing and displaying the creative talents of a large cast and many designers a less daunting task and an appropriate capstone to my graduate studies at UNO.

Chapter Two:
"their reason torn"
An Earthy Foundation of Text

This chapter explores the inherent challenges of directing a classical text in translation, particularly the fragmentary nature of Euripides' *The Bakkhai*. I examine my two attempts to adapt the script and the factors that led to me discarding that project. I compare key scenes between translations by Robert Bagg and C. K. Williams that led to my choosing a version for production. I also document the changes I made to the text, both for clarity and dramatic impact.

TEXT AS STARTING POINT

The basis of most theatrical performance in Western civilization has been the written text. The rock, or tablet with written word, is the "foundation" of theatre. Other elements may provide influence, but for most Western theatre, the word is the beginning. When approaching classical drama, unless a director is fluent in ancient Greek, a translation must be chosen.

The use and approach to translation for performance has changed greatly over the last century. In the early 20th century, universities in the United States and Europe taught Ancient Greek and Latin. Classical plays were often performed in these original languages, under the premise that the meaning would be transmitted through the staging, acting and a cursory knowledge of the language being spoken (See Joanne Bentley's description of

Hippolytus at Smith College as an example [127]). By contrast, in contemporary performance even operas performed in English have super-titles projected to ease comprehension. In the case of classical drama, translation has become the norm, though it is not without its own challenges. Greek translations in the 1920s and 30s were often created in verse, while since the 1960s ancient Greek has been rendered into modern speech and quickly becomes dated. In addition, translation is an inexact activity: word meanings, figures of speech and topical references are often impossible to translate literally, resulting in a range of interpretations between versions, even among those completed at similar times. Translations of ancient Greek texts are usually completed by classical scholars, not playwrights, and are thus intended more for academic research than performance. Exceptions do exist, though some translations completed by poets or playwrights should be termed "adaptations." The challenge, then, becomes to find a translation that is performable and, as director Peter Sellars suggests, is "[equal] to the public at the time you stage it" (Bartow 279). While Sellars, as a professional director, is fortunate to be able to afford having a literal translation completed for his productions, the average university does not have this option, especially for a show directed by a student.

***THE BAKKHAI* PROBLEM**

Scholars have long commented on the fragmentary nature of Euripides' *The Bakkhai*. Like many Greek dramas, it has not reached the present in a

complete form. Any 21st century version is an amalgam of older texts and critical speculation. In particular, there are two *lacuna* (gaps) of prominence, the first of which occurs after line 1329, where Agave states, "Father, look at me, how my destiny has turned" (Williams 81). This is, in fact, where she and Kadmus put Pentheus' body back together and Agave laments over each limb, as reported in Bagg (84). This sequence of lines has been reconstructed by several scholars "with the help of *Christus Patiens*, a peculiar twelfth-century poem on the Passion of Christ, which is composed out of a collage of quotations from various ancient tragedies. One section contains numerous bits from *The Bacchae*, and some of its pieces have been identified as belonging to the lost portion" (Nussbaum xxiv). The use of these fragments both healed and exacerbated the dismemberment within *The Bakkhai* by leaving the reader or director uncertain of a line's correct placement or source, much like Agave is uncertain of the placement of her son's body parts. These efforts towards reconstruction of the text affirm the principle of deconstruction that everything is text.

Not only do differences in language make a "true" translation of Euripides impossible (for even a reader fluent in Ancient Greek might miss historical and cultural references lost to us through history), but there is no ultimate text, no "Ur-Bakkhai" from which to translate. Each translator, scholar or director has the added challenge imparted by the *lacuna* (gaps). The plot points contained in

these gaps have been described in historical accounts of *The Bakkhai* in performance (Kirk 37), but even with the fragments from the *Christus Patiens* poem, the details of these lines, (indeed, the exact number missing) are lost. I would even question how certain one can be that these lines are from *The Bakkhai,* since *Christus Patiens* was drawn from several Greek tragedies. Scholarship and criticism may provide guides, but the translator (and director) of *The Bakkhai* must decide what and how much they will do with these fragments.

Having read the Kenneth Cavendar translation in the Dramatic Literature Seminar, I sought out other versions with more scholarly notations. Geoffrey S. Kirk's 1970 edition differs from many, because, he explains, "I am primarily trying to provide the Greekless reader with an accurate line-by-line translation and an untechnical but analytical commentary" (xvii). Kirk's was an excellent critical starting point, providing a *Bakkhai* that attempted a close approximation of the original Greek and a summary of criticism on the text in the extensive footnotes. However, as a text for performance, Kirk's version was problematic on three fronts: since intended for a *reading* audience, it was awkward when spoken; Kirk attempted to translate the Greek as literally as possible, resulting in an overly formal poetic tone and one that lacked drama; and while it summarized the missing plot points from the Greek text (based on descriptions in other texts written after Euripides), Kirk made no attempt to reconstruct the

text from recovered fragments or create approximate substitutions. Kirk's translation was a useful resource for study, but not a text suitable for performance.

MAKING MY OWN

In this early stage of exploring *The Bakkhai* for my thesis project, I had proposed adapting the script from existing, older translations. The intention was to create a script appropriate for a contemporary university audience which would provide needed humor and an opportunity for musical theatre and dance performance, while also saving the department royalty costs. My first steps toward such a script were in the special seminar dealing with Direction as Adaptation. My final project was a one-person, twenty minute version of *The Bakkhai* using the basic narrative structure, but assembled from fragments of texts from 20th century poets (particularly women and gay men) and punctuated by recorded moments from musical theatre. The technique was somewhat similar to that used by playwright Charles Mee, whose *Orestes 2.0* I greatly admired. The end result was exciting, especially the reaction to the humor and irony, but the overall performance was less successful then I had hoped. The transformation between characters became the focus more than the plot or the text, and the resulting confusion dulled much of the attempted humor. Attempting to compile and perform the piece in a short amount of time, the focus became adapting the dialogue sections of the original, not the choral

moments. This seemed to add to the confusion, as the chorus in the original reiterates points already made by the main actors, and the shift in performance style provides a respite from the debate of the dialogue.

Drawing upon my experience from assembling this piece, I continued to write my own adaptation of Euripides' text. The results were pleasing, but unsatisfactory for several reasons. While geared to a university audience and suffused with needed humor, my progress on the project was not rapid enough. It was my first summer as a graduate student and I struggled to find work and make ends meet while trying to write the adaptation and prepare to direct it. And while the character scenes seemed easy to create, the meaning and purpose of the lengthy choral sections continued to elude me. Facing the waning of summer and my looming coursework and assistantship duties for fall, it became obvious I would not have sufficient time to write and revise my adaptation before production conferences began in late September. I reluctantly abandoned my adaptation plans and focused on selecting a translation suitable for the UNO talent pool and audience, which would also welcome the postmodern directing techniques and the critical approach of ritual (dis)memberment I wished to employ.

COMPARING TRANSLATIONS

Many translations of *The Bakkhai* exist, with the UNO library listing twelve and over sixteen available through amazon.com. My research into the

production history did not show a preferred version was used more than another, though it did seem most translations produced in the theatre were less than twenty years old at the time of production. Beginning with what the UNO library had available, two quickly emerged as appropriate for my needs and stage-worthy. *The Bakkhai*, translated by Robert Bagg, was published in 1978. Bagg also produced translations of Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. His use of wordplay and conversational style appealed to me. The second contender for consideration was *The Bacchae of Euripides* by C. K. Williams. In addition to this text, Williams is a poet in his own right who had also translated Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis*. Williams' style is more poetic and the choral sections progress fluidly, which dovetailed more with my interest in setting them to percussion and utilizing dance.

In an effort to demonstrate the differences between the two translations, I will compare three moments from each version of the text, which were also vital in the challenge of understanding and staging *The Bakkhai*: the Chorus' description of the earthquake; Dionysus sending Pentheus to his death; and Agave and Kadmus attempting to put right the fragments of Pentheus' body. The earthquake follows a long prayer to Dionysus by the Chorus. They plead to him for help when Pentheus takes their leader (Dionysus in human form) captive, and the god's response is to cause an earthquake and the apparent destruction of the palace. In Williams' version, the Chorus describes:

Look, the
palace, Pentheus,
his palace, look,
it shudders, the
whole palace trembles, now
it falls!
Dionysus!
Look! Dionysus!
Loved one!
Dionysus now is in
the palace! Love him,
oh, we adore
him! Look, the lintels
craze and
look the stones
craze! Over
the pillars, crazing
the stone shatters! (39-40)

This stands in sharp contrast to Bagg's translation of the same sequence:

---The palace totters, it's going down!
---Look, it's front cracks, it's splitting open!
---Dionysus is in there. I feel him.
---Worship him, adore him!
---O I do! I do!
---Watch those columns! They've
broken loose from the roof. (39)

Even in its format, Bagg's text looks more like the screenplay to a film, intended to be broken up among many bystanders or members of the Chorus. The tone implied by these lines is that this is a realistic reaction to a realistic disaster. Williams' approach to the same sequence maintains a similar sense of urgency, but keeps a poetic edge. The repetition of Dionysus' name and the alliteration of "s" and "p" words reinforces the poetic, but allows for this to also function as ritual.

The final meeting between Dionysus and Pentheus was also clearly different as presented by Williams and Bagg. Bagg utilizes extensive wordplay and irony:

DIONYSUS . . . Something violent lies ahead
and you won't miss it.
Come with me,
I will see you through it.
Someone else will bring you home.

PENTHEUS Mother!

DIONYSUS Yes! As a great symbol to mankind

PENTHEUS That's my wish.

DIONYSUS you will be carried here

PENTHEUS What luxury!

DIONYSUS hugged in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS You'll make me go all to pieces!

DIONYSUS I'd have it no other way. (63)

Dionysus' reference to not missing what is ahead, sounds like Pentheus will attend the event, but Dionysus knows he will be part of it. It is also a pun to connect "violent" to "ahead," since when the audience sees Pentheus next, it is only his head. Pentheus' exclamation of "Mother!" sounds a bit comical and like a television character, while his comment about going to pieces is a direct (perhaps too direct) foreshadowing of what is to come. C.K. Williams also utilizes irony, but with a subtler hand:

DIONYSUS Ordeals await you, they are fated for you.
Come, I'll lead you there safely.
You'll return with someone else.

PENTHEUS My mother . . .

DIONYSUS . . . a model for all men . . .

PENTHEUS That's my purpose.

DIONYSUS You'll be carried home . . .

PENTHEUS You're spoiling me!

DIONYSUS . . . in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS . . . No, you're *spoiling* me.

DIONYSUS Yes, I *want* to spoil you, in my way. (60)

Williams' version begins with a warning from Dionysus and the promise that Pentheus will *arrive* to see the Bakkhai safely, with no guarantee of safe return. Dionysus does make clear Agave will carry Pentheus home, but Pentheus mistakenly assumes that he, himself, will be alive and whole. Pentheus states Dionysus is "spoiling" him (as in being indulgent), with which the god agrees, but Dionysus in fact means "spoiling" in the sense of ruining, an irony that escapes Pentheus. Thus Williams uses similar wordplay, but in a subtler form.

The depiction of dismemberment is prominent in Euripides' *The Bakkhai,* but never more so than when Agave reassembles the body of the slain Pentheus. Once she has realized her crime, she turns to her father for help with her task:

AGAVE . . . O, old man, come help me, help me
touch this wretched boy. Show me
where to lay his head, show me how
to put his body back together.

Look, his arms are so well muscled,
his legs so strong, but his face, oh,
dearest face, its cheek is barely feathered.
The flesh I nurtured once, I kiss.
The fragments of this body I loved
once, I lay in place. (Williams 82)

In this passage, Williams almost creates a prose poem, for as Agave struggles with the emotion and weight of her task, it makes sense that the language would be simple and awkward, with the simple poetic touch being the phrase "barely feathered." The soft consonants, with a preponderance of "f," "s," and "r" sounds, create an almost whispered tone to the sentences. The Bagg translation is, by contrast, harsher:

AGAVE Father, help me find again his handsome shape.
from these horrible pieces
make him perfect!
I made him once in my womb.
I make him now, again.
How can I do it—embrace his whole body
and kiss him
as when he was a child?
Father, bring me his head.
Set it where it belongs.
I loved his face, his gentle chin.
I loved every part of him.
On his journey to Hades
now, we must leave him
exactly as he was when he was king. (Bagg 65)

The unfortunate choice of "Father, bring me his head," I feared would prompt

laughter from a college audience. The partial rhyme of "chin/him" sounds like a line from a popular song, as does "I loved every part of him." The attempt to mirror childbirth with "remaking" Pentheus (i.e. reassembling his body) seems forced, and an attempt to be poetic that was, in my estimation, awkward. While I was not enthralled with this sequence, much of Bagg's translation seemed very workable.

Certainly both versions have their strengths and weaknesses. The wordplay and humor of the Bagg translation was exciting, but the choral moments lacked flow and did not lend themselves to dance and movement. By contrast, Williams' version had excellent choral options, with repetitions and rhythm for performance, but the dialogue between characters was sometimes so full of metaphor, I wondered if audiences would understand it. Torn in my decision, I gave both versions to Dr. Suprenant for her opinion. She had similar thoughts on the merits of each and suggested combining them, using Bagg's dialogue and William's choral odes. This was an exciting option I had pondered myself, but had been afraid to voice. This tactic also played into the notion of dismemberment by "cannibalizing" two scripts and cobbling them together. To extend the earthy metaphor of this chapter, it also seemed like taking two metals and melting them together to form a stronger alloy. To this end, I had our secretary inquire into royalty costs for each, thinking that if we could afford to pay both, I could go ahead and combine them. While I considered contacting

both translators to see if they would permit the joining, I also feared this might result in them preventing the use of either script if they disapproved. My hope to pay both sets of royalties assuaged any guilty feelings. The resulting royalty quotes were low, but Robert Bagg wanted a videotape of the performance as well. Not wanting to risk anger or legal action should he watch the video and see it wasn't entirely his work, I chose the C. K. Williams translation alone, deciding the strengths of the choral moments were a greater asset than any drawbacks to the dialogue.

CHANGES FOR PERFORMANCE

While pleased overall with the Williams translation, I did make some changes as concession to my directorial intentions and the needs of the audience. The choice of spelling the title "Bakkhai" rather than "Bacchae" came from the translation by Robert Bagg and was done because there is no "c" in the Greek alphabet, so Bakkhai is actually closer in spelling to the original Greek. I also hoped the hard "K" spelling would discourage an audience members pronouncing it "BAH-chai" or some similar derivation. By the same token, I adopted similar spellings for character names such as Kadmus over Cadmus to give a closer sense to the Greek origins.

I made several alterations to the structure of the text, including the creation of a mimed and danced prologue (before Euripides' *prologus*, the long entrance speech of Dionysus). This allowed the performance to begin with

action, like may contemporary films, before the long narration by Dionysus that begins Euripides' text. I also redistributed parts of Pentheus' first speech, giving it to his guards so they could report on Dionysus' activities to their king, rather than Pentheus simply describing what has been happening in his absence. I also took part of Tiresius' first speech and assigned it to Kadmus, so both old men could attempt to woo Pentheus to the cult of Dionysus and also to create more dialogue in the scene. Similarly, when the Herdsman and the Guard report on the activity of the Theban Bakkhai in the mountains, not only did I stage those moments in the balconies, I allowed the actress playing Agave to speak the lines attributed to her. In all of these instances, this redistribution was done to allow the actors more opportunities, alleviate any monotony for the audience in hearing one voice speaking for a long time, and therefore give a more dialogic, 20th century feeling. To this end, I also inserted an intermission for audience comfort at line 853, just after Dionysus invites Pentheus to spy on the Bakkhai in the wilderness. This seemed an appropriately intriguing moment, sparking audience desire to return and was approximately 45 minutes into the performance, shortly past the halfway point.

A STRONG FINISH

My decision to interpolate Doris Humphrey's "Greek Sacrificial Dance" (in a modified form) and to stage the offstage action will be examined further in Chapter Four. My other major textual change to the script was to the final

Chorus moment. Given the end of the text, with the banishment of Agave and Kadmus, their tearful farewells to each other and Agave turning her back on her birth city, the chorus ending as written seemed to me lackluster:

> Many forms are
> there of the
> divine.
> Many things the
> gods accomplish
> unexpectedly.
> What we waited
> for does not
> come to pass, while
> for what remained
> undreamed the god
> finds ways.
> Just such
> doing was this
> doing. (Williams 86-87)

I consulted other versions, including Kirk's and Bagg's translations, but they seemed equally pedestrian. Kirk, however, provided an explanation:

> A coda such as this . . . was conventional for Sophocles and Euripides. Indeed this very one occurs in four other Euripidean plays . . . all of them containing a strong reversal of fortune . . . [thus] its formal yet familiar quality stresses the ritualistic origins of the drama. (140)

This verse from Euripides, then, was similar to the departing words of the priest in the Catholic Masses of my youth, or even as cliché as "they all lived happily ever after" in fairytales. And while I did intend to emphasize *The Bakkhai* as

ritual, my sense of the theatrical found it unsatisfying following what had preceded it. Moreover, this would be an audience who had not experienced many Greek plays, so I could not assume that they would know this is the standard finish to a play by Euripides. My quest for a substitution was fulfilled in an unexpected way. While looking for material for the Postrealist Acting class, a collection of plays by Philip Ridley included the following epigraph:

> Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers.
> Real gods require blood.
>
> Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1)

I was immediately struck by how this quote connected with *The Bakkhai*: Dionysus is truly a half god, being the son of a mortal and a god, and he was designated god of wine. Moreover, myths say he was accepted as a god on Olympus, so he surely could qualify as "real," as Pentheus unfortunately learns. I had considered using this same quote in the production program, and though I had read Hurston's Harlem Renaissance era novel, I couldn't remember the quote, so I sought it out in context. The passage comes when the lead character is contemplating one of many disappointments she faces in the novel. The paragraph that contains the line became the ideal closing chorus, which, though prose, I set up in verse similar to Williams' choral translations:

> All gods who
> receive homage
> are cruel.
> All gods dispense

suffering
without reason.
Otherwise
they would not be
worshipped.
Through indiscriminate
suffering
men know fear
And fear
is the most divine
emotion.
It is the stones
for altars and
the beginning of wisdom.
Half gods
are worshipped
in wine and flowers.
Real gods
require
blood. (145)

This substitution seemed closer in intent to the original than the more general Euripidean ending, but more specific to the actions of *The Bakkhai*. In addition, the closing line "Real gods require blood," seemed to serve as a stronger ending for a 21st century audience than Williams' line, "Just such doing was this doing." Interpolating these sentences seemed justified by my use of deconstructive theory, since if everything we are exposed to is text, then Hurston's work is fair game. It also allowed access into the notion of ritual (dis)memberment that informed this production, allowing me to carefully "steal" from the "body" of Hurston's work and transplant it to that of Euripides. In addition, the passage was printed and credited to Hurston in the program, so the savvy audience member would recognize the source.

The other changes and this final moment from Zora Neale Hurston provided me with a text that seemed a workable foundation for rehearsals and production. It was a "rock" to build on, with just enough dust (history) and dirt (questions) to be blown by the airy wind of critical theory.

Chapter Three:
"their reason torn":
The Air of Theory in *The Bakkhai*

Written approximately 408 BCE and produced after the death of Euripides (Bagg 69), *The Bakkhai* could be considered the epitome of Classical Drama, both in form (scenes alternating with choral odes) and subject (god vs. man). That said, some might question the judgment behind applying contemporary literary theory to a staging of this most "Classical" of plays. Yet, as scholar Amy S. Green asserts, "few . . . directors confess to having read much literary criticism, they approach plays as what Barthes calls 'methodological fields' for theatrical exploration" (10). My own "theatrical exploration" exposed me to literary theory not merely as a catalyst to dissolve ambiguities, but as a fresh wind which cleared cobwebs and flipped textual pages, allowing for visions and associations from my own (and others') experiences. Director Peter Sellars, who has generated many "rewrightings" (Green's term for texts revised or re-envisioned by directors into theatrical events), offers this equation for producing play texts: "whatever you do onstage must = the public at the time you stage it" (Bartow 279). Operating from Sellars' equation, utilizing contemporary literary theory, making changes to the text (Chapter 2), exploiting aspects of musical theatre and employing postmodern directing techniques (Chapter 4) seemed effective steps to stage Euripides' text and to equal the public at the time of my 21st century staging (February 2003).

My approach to staging Euripides' *The Bakkhai* was inspired and informed by my exposure to contemporary literary theory. "Inspire" comes from the Latin, "Breathe (life, a soul, etc.) *in, into*" (Trumble 1388). The inspiring and heady realm of literary theory demands a definition of the terms used to explore *The Bakkhai* from a 21st century perspective. In the following pages I examine definitions of ritual in relation to theatre and (dis)memberments specific to *The Bakkhai,* as well as how these definitions relate to the more specific notion of ritual (dis)memberment (what the ancient Greeks called *sparagmos*). Poststructuralism will be examined in conjunction with (dis)memberment, and a Structuralist comparison between the plots of *The Bakkhai* and many 20th century musicals will demonstrate both their close relation and their problematic differences. The vocabulary of musical theatre will lead into a definition of Postmodernism and how its tenets relate to this production. These definitions and sample demonstrations of literary theories are intended to "clear the air" regarding their use in other chapters and provide wind-power to stir the waves of production and the fires of reflection in the chapters that follow.

RITUAL

Before examining the large notion of ritual (dis)memberment, it seems helpful to examine its smaller components of ritual and dismemberment as separate entities. Rituals are common both in religious and theatrical

activities, so the history of both is largely intertwined. While part of civic proceedings, classical Greek theatre was also largely religious, originating in agrarian ceremonies (similar in plot to *The Bakkhai*) and dithyrambic hymns sung to the god Dionysus (Pepiton 1). In *The Bakkhai* itself these religious aspects abound, including: the presence of Dionysus, god of wine, theatre and revelry; references to the actions of other gods, including Zeus, Apollo and Artemis; Kadmus and Tiresius' paying homage to Dionysus and urging Pentheus to join them; the ruined palace cordoned off as a memorial to Semele (Dionysus' mother), who died when struck by Zeus' lightning; and Agave and Kadmus' careful preparations for Pentheus' proper burial. Yet the definitions of what constitutes ritual, especially as they relate to theatre, have shifted from ancient Greece to the present.

Much has been written on ritual as it relates to theatre, with a range of descriptions and definitions. While Antonin Artaud felt he found ritual in Balinese dance-drama because he could not understand it, and Richard Schechner attempts to separate ritual and theatre (since he feels they often differ in their multiple purposes), director Peter Hall sees ritual as an activity attempting to invoke change. Choreographers Shirley Ririe and Joan Woodbury suggest ritual consists of "a solemn ceremony. In early times it was often done for religious purposes. But ritual can also be described as any detailed method or procedure faithfully or regularly followed" (17). Theatre theorist David Wiles

echoes this by referencing early sociologist Emile Durkheim, who defined "ritual . . . as a collective activity with a social purpose" (Wiles 27). These definitions reminded me of my early impressions of *The Bakkhai*, comparing it to group activities as diverse as sporting events, lynch mobs or musical theatre performance—instances of collective activity combined with strong emotion, rather than necessarily religious purpose. Director Charlie Pepiton has written of this shift in ritual and theatre from its Greek beginnings:

> Theatre, at this point in history, was inextricably linked with religion. The plays were literally intended for worship as they were both written and performed in honor of the gods. However, as time passed theatre began to move away from the church. That is to say the focus of theatre began to revolve more around the performance than on the purpose for that performance. (Pepiton 1)

He examines this change in the Greek theatre and the emphasis in the Roman theatre on crowd-pleasing spectacle, before theatre was transformed by the early Christian church towards religious purposes again, only to veer away from that in the Renaissance. This shift towards and away from religion has continued throughout history, but the ritualistic aspect has always remained. When production conferences began, I suggested to my production team that perhaps *The Bakkhai* has been enacted repeatedly since classical times, on

varying sites and for a range of purposes, with variations and adaptations from antiquity to now. While early versions were performed for the gods and later shifted to performance for entertainment, there were also politicized versions such as the Roman production that used the actual head of a murdered enemy leader as the head of Pentheus (Kirk 67). In the early 20th century it was produced for students to practice their knowledge of classical Greek and in the early 21st century I was emphasizing its similarities with musical theatre. The ritual has been repeated, but for varying purposes throughout time. More importantly for this production, the ritual aspects can be witnessed in the repetition of dismemberments, both literal and symbolic, and the larger construct of ritual dismemberment.

(DIS)MEMBERMENT

The Oxford English Dictionary defines dismemberment as:

> 1. The act of depriving of members or limbs, or of dividing limb from limb . . . 2. Division of a whole into parts or sections, so as to destroy its integrity; cutting to pieces, partition (e.g. of a country or empire) . . . 3. Expulsion or cutting off from membership. (Simpson 794)

All three definitions are applicable to *The Bakkhai*, beginning with the literal rending of limbs. Literal dismemberment is referenced three times in *The Bakkhai*. The first is a warning from Kadmus to his grandson, Pentheus, recalling

the death of his cousin:

> (R)emember Actaeon: his death, how
> horrible it was; the hounds
> he'd raised with meat from his own hands,
> tearing him to pieces on the mountain,
> because he bragged he could outhunt Artemis.
> Don't let that be you.
> (Williams 22-23)

Though occurring before the action of the plot, this death sets up a precedent that dismemberment is a punishment for angering the gods. This dismemberment serves as foreshadowing for the audience. It should also serve as a warning to Pentheus, reminding him of Actaeon's fate and demonstrating the powerful influence of gods like Dionysus.

The second reference occurs when the women of Thebes attack livestock in the mountains, as reported by the Herdsman:

> They swooped down on our grazing
> cattle: bare-handed, they attacked.
> Watch: a bellowing heifer, udders
> gorged—a woman picks it bodily up,
> and tears it limb from limb. (46)

Despite this incident, Pentheus wallows in his own hubris, angered at the actions

of Dionysus' followers, but convinced he can avoid a similar fate. Even though there is a family history of *sparagmos* for denying the gods, he ignores this recent incident of dismemberment as punishment, proceeding as though he is invulnerable to the whimsy of the gods.

The final physical dismemberment is the murder of Pentheus himself by the same women (including Agave, his mother and Ino, his aunt), when they mistake him for a lion and rend him into pieces:

> One had a forearm,
> one had one of his feet, still warm in its sandal.
> His ribs were stripped of flesh, and all the women,
> all those bloody hands, were throwing pieces of him
> back and forth between them as though it were a game.
> (70-71)

While differing specifics, the basic rending of body parts is the same in all three instances, and all are due to godly influence, making these dismemberments rituals for religious reasons, which the Greeks called *sparagmos*.

In regards to the second definition of dismemberment, "Division of a whole into parts or sections. . ." (Simpson 794), it is represented by the women abandoning Thebes to worship Dionysus, thereby upsetting the normal activity of the city. The social order is further upset by figures like the Herdsman entering the city (rather than staying in his rural home) as well as advocating the worship

of Dionysus. Dionysus (a foreigner) compounds the effect of all this consternation by questioning Pentheus' position as king.

"Expulsion or cutting off from membership" (Simpson 794) is perhaps the second most obvious form of dismemberment in *The Bakkhai.* Semele, the mother of Dionysus, is labeled a liar by her family before the play begins, since her family denies that Zeus was her lover and Dionysus her son, thus separating even her memory from her family as a legitimate member. Pentheus is separated from his mother and aunts by their compulsion to follow Dionysus and is further excluded from the family by the insistence of his grandfather, Kadmus, to follow the god as well. Dionysus is temporarily cut off from his tribe of followers when imprisoned by Pentheus, who also denies that Dionysus is a god, thereby cutting him off from the pantheon of accepted gods on Olympus. Pentheus himself must dress as a woman (thus being denied membership in his gender)and leave his city (depriving him of his status as king) to observe the Bakkhai on the mountain. In the final scene, Kadmus, his wife and Agave are all banished from Thebes and each other, and therefore lose their positions as royalty, Thebans and family members. Finally, Agave renounces her position as one of the Bakkhai, leaving her truly alone.

Each of these (dis)memberments complicates the plot and contributes to the downfall of Pentheus. Yet the definition of ritual (dis)memberment is more specific and limited, and the first example I found in print raised as many

questions as it answered. Scholar and translator Robert Bagg defines the "sacrament" of *sparagmos*, "the tearing apart of a live animal victim" (2). Use of the word sacrament seemed to imply a willingness on the part of the sacrificial victim, which seemed odd for humans, and especially so for an animal. Other definitions are less specific about the animal aspect, allowing merely for the dismemberment action, whether it be animal or human. Indeed, I realized there is a question of how "human" or "animal" Pentheus truly is. When Dionysus announces the presence of Pentheus to the women of Thebes, he calls him "the man" (Williams 69), yet Agave announces, "We have to catch the animal" (70). While easily explained as delusions brought on by the god, this ambiguity continues later when she displays the head of her son to the Chorus, calling it both a bull and a lion. Both creatures are totems associated with Dionysus and both are forms the Chorus had urged the god to assume (Williams 66) before the Messenger enters with news of Pentheus' death. Upon my initial reading, this prompted confusion: was Euripides conflating Dionysus with Pentheus? Did they somehow share totems, because they are cousins? Did their similarities in family origin mean the Greek audience saw them as different aspects of one being?

Furthermore, in the same scene the Chorus also encourages Dionysus to become a serpent—the only animal form Agave does *not* associate with the head of Pentheus. Yet looking at the mythology of Pentheus' family history, calling

Pentheus a serpent would have made sense: Echion, father of Pentheus and husband to Agave, was a "sown-man," having grown into a soldier from a serpent's tooth planted by Kadmus. Indeed, that is the origin of Thebes itself, for after slaughtering the serpent, Orphis, the goddess Athena instructed Kadmus to plant the teeth, all of which grew into soldiers and became the founders of the city. The ancient Greek audience would have known this myth, so why, with this snake connection, did Agave *not* compare Pentheus to a serpent, but only the other forms of Dionysus? I wondered if the "serpent" association would have been assumed by the original Greek audience, and therefore, too obvious to mention.

SPARAGMOS

Confusion regarding this identification of totemic animals and the conflation of Pentheus and Dionysus is alleviated somewhat by Gilbert Murray's essay, "Euripides 'Bacchae' and the Ritual Pattern of Tragedy." He links the structure of Euripides' play to the annual rituals connected to "[t]he Year Daemon—Vegetation Spirit of Corn God or whatever we call him" (105) and also points to similar stories not only in Greek myth but also across cultures. According to Murray, this ritual is common in the mythology of many cultures, celebrating the end of one growing cycle or year and encouraging fertility in the year ahead. The structure of the ritual consists of:

(1) An Agon or Contest, in which the Daemon fights against his

> enemy, who—since it is really this year fighting against last year—is apt to be almost identical with himself ; (2) a Pathos, or disaster, which very commonly takes the shape of "Sparagmos," or tearing in pieces; the body of the Corn God being scattered in innumerable seeds over the earth; sometimes of some other sacrificial death; (3) a Messenger, who brings the news; (4) a Lamentation, very often mixed with a Song of Rejoicing, since the death of the Old King is also the accession of the new; (5) the Discovery or Recognition of the hidden or dismembered god; and (6) his epiphany or Resurrection in glory. (105)

Murray's description of the Contest (or Agon) between the old and new year explains the connection between Dionysus and Pentheus as being different aspects of the same self, and why the ancient audience would have known to view Pentheus and Dionysus as part of the same being. This also allows for the animal totems (snake, bull and lion) to be identified with both. This model of *sparagmos* as an annual event also aligns with the idea I presented to my collaborators and cast that *The Bakkhai* text is a ritual, having been repeatedly performed from antiquity to the present. In addition, the attempt to incorporate snake imagery would re-emerge later in both the staging and the set design (see Chapter 4).

The Pathos, or disaster portion of Murray's structure, does involve the

sparagmos of Pentheus, but it also echoes similar events in other mythic stories where these figures are torn apart (Orpheus torn apart by animals in another Greek myth, Jesus symbolically being "torn apart" as bread, Osiris torn to pieces in Egyptian legend, etc.). This demonstrates that ritual or repetition is not just typical of *The Bakkhai* story, but of many similar stories in Greek and other myths. Murray also defines sparagmos as a "tearing in pieces," with no mention or requirement of the victim being animal, but the literal dismemberments mentioned or occurring in *The Bakkhai* are not purely animal or purely human: Acteon is human until transformed into a stag; the cows of the Herdsman are torn apart; Pentheus is perceived as an animal by the Bakkhai, but does not physically transform, though he does take on the guise of a woman and is presumably drunk, therefore "transformed" by wine, "not himself."

Murray's mention of the pieces from the sacrifice functioning as seeds, though, hearkens back to Kadmus slaying the serpent Orphis and sowing its teeth in the ground. Some scholars have suggested the actions of *The Bakkhai* are an attempt to avenge the serpent's death. There seems some credence to revenge as a motive, particularly since Dionysus describes how Kadmus and his wife are destined to be transformed into snakes at the end of Euripides' text. It struck me that the death of Orphis is a moment of *sparagmos* itself being avenged on Kadmus' family.

The other plot points of *The Bakkhai* essentially follow the remainder of

Murray's ritual stages. One of Pentheus' men serves as messenger, bringing news of his death (stage 3) and performing the Lamentation (stage 4), which the Chorus immediately follows with a Song of Rejoicing:

> Dance
> now! Exult
> and dance
> now, Bacchae! (Williams 71)

Kadmus and his men bring in the remains "of the hidden or dismembered" Pentheus (stage 5) after having searched the mountainside for the various pieces. The one stage of Murray's model missing from *The Bakkhai* is stage 6, the "epiphany or Resurrection in glory." The remains of Pentheus are left on the stage at the end, reassembled as best they could be, but certainly not glorified or resurrected. It would be difficult to argue that Dionysus (being part of the same self) achieves glory instead of Pentheus, for his departing line, having banished Agave and Kadmus is: "I suffered terribly, my name, in Thebes, deprived of honor" (Williams 86). If he considers himself "deprived of honor" it seems unlikely one could declare he has achieved glory. Certainly, Dionysus has enacted vengeance, but glory seems lacking. Indeed, when W. H. Auden wrote the libretto for an opera based on Euripides' story, he changed the ending and had Dionysus raise his mother, Semele, from the dead to join him on Mount Olympus. Despite the lack of resurrection in Euripides' text, the plot of *The Bakkhai* follows Murray's "Ritual Pattern of Tragedy" fairly closely. The implications of the missing Resurrection stage will be discussed further in

the sections on Structuralism and Poststructuralism.

So if *sparagmos*, or ritual (dis)memberment, is part of a fertility tradition, the question became how that applied to staging an ancient, fragmented, religious-related text for a contemporary theatre audience that no longer demands that theatre serve religious functions, but more often is "a collective activity with a social purpose" (Wiles 27). For my purposes, other critics had already pointed out how musical theatre is similar in its structure of scenes alternating with dance and choral moments. Moreover, it often stirs the strong emotions and actions sometimes associated with religious fervor: 1) extreme devotion (attending a particular show multiple times); 2) proselytizing (playing cast albums, wearing and displaying merchandise to convince others to attend, enjoy and spread enthusiasm for a production); 3) pilgrimage (traveling to other cities to attend performances); 4) martyrdom (enduring mocking by those who prefer other shows or care nothing for musical theatre); 5) participation (learning the lines and lyrics to sing along with cast albums, karaoke and professional performances, as well as attempting to become part of any amateur production). Musical theatre seemed a strong cultural equivalent to the Greek original.

The ritual aspects of musical theatre seemed obvious, but the metaphor can be extended even to fertility and dismemberment. Criticism is a strong aspect of contemporary culture, where we often hear language reminiscent of

(dis)memberment. We speak of an actor or production being "torn apart" or "savaged by critics" and sometimes "he had his head handed to him." Musicals are often revived (perpetuating the repetitive ritual aspect) and more often today reconceived (taken apart, restructured, new songs added or previously discarded numbers put back in) where some will worship the results while others will "tear it to shreds." Fertility is evident in this reconception (using old pieces as seeds for new work) and we even speak of theatre "seasons," which have their own cycles of growth. This metaphorical comparison to (dis)memberment, this mode of playing with language demonstrates how it is constructed, or rather, (de)constructed, which shows how the application of Postructuralist theory is vital to a contemporary staging of Euripides.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Theorist Raman Selden suggests "Poststructuralism is simply a fuller working out of the implications of structuralism [, but] poststructuralism tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism" (125). So while Structuralist theory supposes that different literary works may demonstrate similar patterns in plot and theme, Poststructuralism continues this process, revealing how any attempt to show similarities also, by its nature, points up its differences. Based largely in the work of theorists like Frederick Saussure, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, Poststructuralism supposes that everything is text. In the realm of theatre, not only is the text of the play considered, but the design,

the staging, the casting, the choice of space, the ushers, the lobby, etc. are also different texts interacting with each other While Structuralism seeks to define the abstract patterns in a text, ignoring the idiosyncrasies (or differences), Poststructuralism focuses on these very irregularities or cracks, using them to demonstrate how the text is made (and already is being unmade). Emerging from semiotics (the study of signs and what they signify), the construction of language itself becomes suspect, revealing that there are no absolutes or "truths," but merely a series of signs and signifiers that seek to define each other, meanwhile pointing up their inadequacies in doing so. While differences might be suggested, a definitive sign/signifier relationship is impossible to reach.

The application of Poststructuralist theory is usually labeled Deconstruction. American theorist Elinor Fuchs defines deconstructive thinking as operating from "an understanding that seemingly solid constructs and accepted hierarchies tend to dissolve under scrutiny" (11). A deconstructive reading "begins by noting the hierarchy, proceeds to reverse it, and finally resists the assertion of a new hierarchy by displacing the second term from a position of superiority too" (Selden 147). These hierarchies, also often labeled binaries, are pairings of supposedly oppositional ideas or concepts.

Thus, the "(dis)memberment" in the title of my thesis would be a binary pairing with "memberment" or, perhaps in more correct English, "assembly" or "wholeness." In the hierarchy of the pairing, traditional thinking would privilege

"wholeness" over "dismemberment." Yet it could be argued that it is because of his dismemberment that Pentheus is known, famous, even "(re)membered." This word is both a description of the action of memory as well as a pun on the action of putting the pieces of his body back together. Thus, since the fragmentation of Pentheus becomes as important as his wholeness, neither can be viewed as privileged in the binary of their pairing. They simply exist, and indeed, one cannot be defined clearly without the other.

The use of the parentheses on (re)member, like the (dis)memberment in my thesis title, is a deconstructive technique. It alerts the reader to the origin and fragmentation of words and their constantly fluid state. It should also be noted that the application of poststructuralist theory is labeled Deconstruction, not simply destruction. Words or concepts are not being destroyed—merely taken apart to demonstrate they were assembled in the first place and can be put back together in the same or different ways much as Pentheus himself is. This also reveals the binary basis of a concept, and to what degree that binary is as dependent on its construction as the words labeling it. Like the ritual of *The Bakkhai*, words and concepts are constantly being assembled and taken apart using Deconstructive techniques, just like the body of Pentheus. This celebration of fragmentation takes a contemporary form in Postmodern theory, where popular (or "low") is not valued lower than high culture, and indeed, sometimes is valued more. Thus, the popularity of musical theatre does not

make classical Greek theatre more valued, it simply means it is valued for what it is. Under traditional Structuralist theory, musical theatre would not have been examined for abstract patterns, since that effort would have been reserved for "good" literature.

STRUCTURALISM

The comparison of Gilbert Murray's model with Euripides' *Bakkhai* text and other myths is an exercise in Structuralist theory. As defined by Mark Fortier, in his book *theory/theatre*:

> (S)tructuralism has proceeded by scientific principles to find the abstract patterns behind all cultural activity, thereby seeing past idiosyncrasies to the way that many cultural activities are, in the abstract, the same. (233)

This sense of patterning came into play in my own reading when I noted similarities between religious fervor and musical theatre fanaticism. Yet part of my initial interest in *The Bakkhai* was due not only to my recognizing general similarities in the structure of classical Greek theatre and American musicals. On the contrary, I also noticed, and felt compelled to acknowledge, the specific similarities between the plot of *The Bakkhai* and the plots of 20th century musicals, since this seemed to further the notion of Euripides' story as a ritual that is repeated and adapted throughout theatrical history. Just as Gilbert Murray noted similar patterns between *The Bakkhai* and myths from many cultures,

I charted similarities between Euripides' plot and 20th century American musicals such as *The Music Man, The Sound of Music, 110 in the Shade* and *Footloose*. In my own Structuralist reading of the plots of these musicals and *The Bakkhai*, the following pattern emerged: 1) a stranger arrives in a community, bringing music and/or dance (and entwined with those, philosophies of life, love and even sexuality); 2) This arrival transforms the community; 3) At least one person is resistant to the transformation, often the stranger's double and/or their romantic ideal; 4) Despite their differences, the Stranger and their double become closer; 5) Some "truth" is revealed which results in the Stranger (or their double) being rejected and/or absorbed into the community. Charting these similarities was not merely an exercise in Structuralist theory for me. Acknowledging these musical theatre equivalents reinforced for myself that this text could still have resonance with a contemporary audience. It also provided a wealth of material for the Postmodern directing techniques I wanted to utilize (see below and Chapter 4), and gave me a vocabulary more relevant to young actors and potential audience members. For example, I could say in rehearsal, "the Chorus needs to be more involved, even when they're not talking, just like the townswomen in *The Music Man*."

However, there are distinct idiosyncrasies between these librettos and *The Bakkhai*, for while they have a similar overall structure, the details and endings

are quite different. Unlike Euripides, none of the Strangers in the musical librettos mentioned are divine creatures, nor do the musical plots end in the deaths of anyone, especially at the hand of a family member. Are ignoring these discrepancies what Fortier meant by "looking past idiosyncrasies" as a means to "find the abstract patterns"? Going back to Murray's ritual model, even Euripidean scholar Charles Segal acknowledges the problems within Murray's analysis of *The Bakkhai* if the discrepancies are ignored:

> Whatever validity there may be to such mythic patterns, Euripides' play itself offers but the most fitful glimmers of any rebirth or renewal of order after chaos. Virtually all the ritual actions of the play are ambiguous. They serve only to underline the fundamentally ambiguous nature of the Dionysiac religion, its problematical relation to civilized life, its precarious suspension between individual ecstasy and collective violence. (37)

Segal's assertion that *The Bakkhai* fails to conform to the ritual model set forth by Gilbert Murray is echoed in my own comparison of Euripides' text with Murray's model, as well as my comparison between *The Bakkhai* and 20th century musical theatre works. While there are many plot similarities, their endings are largely different. It would seem this is when Structuralism tips over into the realm of Poststructuralism—for when the comparisons become detailed, they indicate that their differences are as prominent as their similarities,

and indeed are inherent to both Structuralism and Poststructuralism. Using aspects of both (which are older and newer critical techniques, respectively) is one example of Postmodern critical theory, which features fragmentation and utilizes aspects of "high" and "low" culture; a classic binary pairing which Poststructuralism and Postmodernism challenge.

POSTMODERNISM

Unlike many of the theories and terms defined in this chapter, all aspects of Postmodernism are not inherent within the text of *The Bakkhai*. Instead, Postmodern theory and directing techniques were applied like a gaseous compound or other catalyst to reveal contemporary perceptions of the text. This exposure allowed for the revelation of qualities and moments unique to this production, rather than universal to Euripides' text. These efforts allowed for my personal vision as well as providing greater accessibility for a university theatre audience.

According to W.B. Worthen in *Modern Drama*, "postmodern works are generally characterized by stylistic 'quotation,' an invocation and disengagement from history and the fragmentation of artistic surface" (119). Postmodernism tends to combine high and low culture with no regard for good or bad (since, as a binary pairing, good and bad can be deconstructed). While Modernism also emphasized fragmentation in narrative, lamenting its presence in the world, Postmodernism celebrates fragmentation, relishing the singularity of each shard,

reflecting against the others.

Euripides' text of *The Bakkhai* does not immediately qualify or invite Postmodern theory, as Worthen's definition also describes the Postmodern as a late 20th century phenomenon, nor is the text as written characterized by stylistic quotation (often labeled "Pastiche"). As noted in the section on Poststructuralism, the narrative and history of the text both feature fragmentation, which is one aspect of Postmodernism—deciding what to do with the pieces.

The decision to approach *The Bakkhai* with Postmodern theory, then, was a conscious choice on my part (as noted in my introduction) as a director and theorist working in the early 21st century. Using techniques for rehearsal borrowed from directors such as Anne Bogart and Jerzy Grotowski not only emphasizes the Postmodern aspects of Classical Drama, it also serves to make the production equal the public at the time it was staged, as Peter Sellars insists must happen.

Both Bogart and her protégé, Tina Landau, use what they call Composition exercises, which fragment authority and creativity by having the actors create movement pieces based on criteria from the director, then editing the movement and gestures to create a movement "score" for the pieces they direct. This allows for the acknowledgment of pop culture moments and an actor's contemporary points of reference (see Chapter 4). I used similar

techniques when staging *The Bakkhai*, thus allowing for resonance with those more contemporary musical theatre moments noted earlier.

For example, when Kadmus and Tiresius prepared for the entrance of Pentheus, rather than hiding, they assumed "Grecian Urn" poses, aping the women of River City in *The Music Man*. In the stage and cinema versions of Meredith Willson's musical, the Mayor's wife and her friends perform a Delsarte-like interpretive dance, modeled on poses and clothing from Classical Greek vases. While some audience members recognized the source of the poses, it was more important to me to utilize a 20th century understanding (even verging on stereotype) of what is "Greek." Rather than referring to something from ancient times, referencing a mid-20th century popular American musical gives it a way of refracting antiquity through time to show how perceptions of what is "Greek" have been interpreted in different art forms. Thus, while Modernism would emphasize "high culture" and only literary sources, Postmodernism's acknowledgment of pop or "low" culture allows accessibility to all levels of society, not privileging the educated over a less educated audience. These extremes embodied my theoretical struggle with *The Bakkhai*. On one hand, was this Classical text—perceived as high culture with a long history of production but possessing an expected burden of being long-winded and rhetorical in its speeches. At the other extreme, there was my perception that Euripides' words could still reach a contemporary audience. By tweaking it with

textual alterations, staging offstage action, inserting references from popular culture (like musicals and modern dance) it could capture the attention of a university audience. While the theoretical concepts of ritual dismemberment, Poststructuralism and Postmodernism certainly suggested ways to approach the material and techniques for rehearsals, I believed funneling the various waters of the production process would be the most exciting and challenging aspect of the entire thesis cycle.

ENACTING RITUAL (DIS)MEMBERMENT

Drawing from these theories and definitions provided clarity when choosing directing techniques and acting exercises, as well as deciding how to approach rehearsing and staging Euripides' text. My purpose in enacting the ritual (dis)memberment of *The Bakkhai* was to use contemporary theory and techniques to take apart assumptions about Greek tragedy. By utilizing a fragmented text, whose plot contains multiple dismemberments (both literal and figurative) I hoped to show parallels between ancient Greek theatre and popular culture like contemporary musical theatre. My shorthand for the production cycle was the notion that in life and theatre all we have is fragments. What matters is how we put them together.

Chapter Four:
"demented from the holy"
Plunging into the Waters of Production

This chapter draws upon the close reading of Chapter Two and the critical theory of Chapter Three to chart the tempestuous waters of production, from meetings and design conferences to auditions, callbacks, a sampling of rehearsals and the final addition of technical elements. The scenes will be discussed in chronological order of their progression through the text, from the prologue through the reassembly of Pentheus' body.

"Symmetry is lifeless

Two dimensional design is lifeless"

(Humphrey 159)

These dictums are from modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey's book, *The Art of Making Dances*, part of a Check List she provides to choreographers, "to avoid the commonest mistakes" (159) such as "lifeless" design. It was given to me when I first began studying the Humphrey-Weidman Dance technique as an undergraduate. While intended for the modern dance field, Humphrey's advice is applicable to many modes of performance. These points will punctuate this chapter, much as they did the process of directing Euripides' *The Bakkhai*, functioning to channel the many streams of thought and action involved in a production of this size. While ideally a thesis project is intended as the culmination of the learning process, too often demands of classes and life

make preparation and execution of such a project difficult. Doris Humphrey and her collaborator Charles Weidman faced similar challenges when they attempted to balance their ideas and theories of modern dance with the practice of teaching, choreographing and performing to make a living (Cohen 119), which may have been part of why I returned to this undergraduate learning to help me navigate this journey at the end of my graduate studies. Thus, in addition to her dance techniques, much of the pragmatic expertise and advice of Doris Humphrey was useful when directing *The Bakkhai*.

FALL AND RECOVERY

When I first read *The Bakkhai*, I was reminded of my training in Doris Humphrey's modern dance technique, with its emphasis on Fall and Recovery. The two extremes of motion seemed appropriate for the extremes of the struggle between Pentheus and Dionysus. Further research led me to Humphrey's readings in philosophy that gave credence to her emerging ideas about movement.

Humphrey biographer Selma Jeanne Cohen explains that when reading Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Humphrey found ideas to support what she had already observed about movement:

> From the German philosopher she took the contrasted concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, the dual drives in the human being that impel him on the one hand toward rest, order, balance

> and security; on the other, toward activity, exuberance, excitement and risk. (Cohen 119)

Humphrey's overriding principle of Fall and Recovery was illustrated in these two extremes. More importantly for my purposes, it literally embodied the struggle in *The Bakkhai* between the human king, Pentheus, and the boyish god Dionysus. As Cohen describes it:

> Dance, then, lay in the arc between two deaths, the lassitude of the body erect and the body prone, when the standing body began to sway from its security or when the lying body began to fight its way upward—there was dance. (119)

This notion of Dionysian and Apollonian, irrational and rational, is an effective construct for approaching the graduate thesis project—in my case, Euripides' *The Bakkhai*. "The body erect" seems to represent the actors waiting at the ready, uneasy about moving. In contrast "the body prone" is the text, the words on the page waiting for the collision with the bodies in space. For such purposes, Doris Humphrey was a practical guide.

RATIONAL AND IRRATIONAL

While preparing for rehearsals and studying for my classes, I stumbled across Jayme Kosyn's article, "The Dramaturg and the Irrational." Ostensibly about her work as dramaturg on a production of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, it also covers the larger topic of the need of the dramaturg (and by implication, all

theatre artists) to trust not only the fact-based, rational "Apollonian" aspects of a production, but also the instinctual, uncertain, irrational "Dionysian" impulses. As she explains, "The great irony in presenting the research for a classical text is that mystery is embedded in the very information provided. Answers carry the embryos of new, larger questions" (Koszyn 279). This notion appealed to me many times in the production process as I berated myself for not knowing enough about the play or the period or the mythology itself. Yet Koszyn suggests that Greek plays especially (but many plays in general) invite this kind of thinking, that one can never know "enough," that no amount of study would be sufficient preparation. Instead, instinct must take over, especially as the pressures of the production cycle make further study impossible. Glancing at another text, playwright Paula Vogel suggested:

> The greats plays of our theatrical legacy, which we will never be able to consume once, e.g. *Woyzeck*, *Macbeth*, *The Baccae* [sic] . . . deconstruct playworlds which in analogy to their mirrored contemporary worlds, unravel their own making. (96)

I had read this quote many times before, but never realized it mentioned *The Bakkhai* as well as *Woyzeck*, which was another favorite play. As I ran across both Koszyn's article and Vogel's quote shortly before auditions took place, they seemed to be a sort of universal "go-ahead." Yes, I had examined the text thoroughly; my focus on ritual (dis)memberment seemed sound, both from a

critical approach and for the connections found with my first love, musical theatre; I had found exercises and approaches through mentors and reading that would serve me in rehearsal; no, I would never know "enough" to direct Euripides' work; however, it seemed if I focused not only on the rational things I had learned but also trusted the text, my own background in musical theatre and dance, as well as my own instincts, the needed help would be provided, whether rationally or irrationally.

PRODUCTION CONFERENCES

The production meetings took place beginning in October 2001 and focused on connecting everyone to my vision of the world of the play. My discussions with the creative team were greatly influenced by my findings regarding text and critical theory. Given the Greek theatre origins as a tribute to Dionysus, emerging from the dithyrambic choruses dedicated to him, the focus I selected was the notion of *The Bakkhai* as ritual (dis)memberment, as outlined in Chapter Three. I explained that rather than a depiction of supposed real events, this production would be a ritualized ceremony of dismemberment, which relates the narrative of Dionysus and Pentheus and Agave. Theoretically, it had been performed for thousands of years in different times and ways, but just as any ceremony or event is repeated, it had been reinterpreted over the years. Given this conceit, I envisioned an anachronistic production, utilizing elements from

multiple time periods, somewhat like the work of director/designer Julie Taymor. The designers were concerned that it might be too broad an interpretation and would lead to a scattered look for the production. At the suggestion Dr. Suprenant, we explored a more binary approach, organized around the extremes of Pentheus and Dionysus. It broke down somewhat like this:

DIONYSUS	PENTHEUS
Organic	Inorganic
Asymmetrical	Symmetrical
Natural	Man-made
Biology	Technology
Syncopated	Steady
Colorful	Black and white
Lyrical	Militaristic

Having limited the contrasts in this way, the designers were much more enthusiastic, believing we could utilize a variety of time periods without confusing the audience. Further meetings both as a group and with the individual designers allowed us to refine our ideas.

"He made the ruins hallowed ground" (Williams 4)

The scenic demands of *The Bakkhai* are minimal, but challenging in a smaller space: the smoking ruins of the house of Semele, mother of Dionysus; an entrance to the palace; and exits into the city and the mountains. The

action of the play includes an earthquake and fire which damage the palace, but my research indicated this had originally been a challenge for the Chorus to communicate through acting and movement rather than stagecraft. Euripides' writing has Dionysus suggest this destruction is illusory, telling the Chorus that Pentheus "thought the palace was in flames" (Williams 42). Given an audience more accustomed to cinematic "realism" and stage spectacle, finding the appropriate presentation of this disaster seemed to reside on a continuum between Chorus description and special effects. Eventually, in production it became a moment when choral work, movement, lighting, sound and rattling the railings of the theatre combined to provide the Dionysus inspired "illusion." Having come to the conclusion that such a moment could be achieved, the challenge shifted to highlighting the theatre space and embodying the mythic feel of the show.

The set designer, Todd Edwards, was very flexible regarding the use of the space and shared my enthusiasm for the potential appearance and options of using the whole of the theatre. Initially, we considered the classical Greek theatre arrangement, with a scene house on the stage and an orchestra in front of a stage for the Chorus, with the audience on three sides. As this took up a good deal of floor space, we examined other configurations, finally choosing to place the audience in the round. This allowed for a wide central playing space, with entrances from the four corners, which we associated with each of the four

base elements: the lofty columns of the palace of Pentheus suggested the element of air; the scaffolding which served as the exit to the city (and access for Dionysus to flow from the balconies to the floor) we associated with water; fire was connected with the smoking, vine-covered ruins of Semele's house; and earth was given form through a rough passage to represent the mountains outside Thebes. The arrangement in the round gave me the opportunity to utilize the balconies that encircle the space. Since a contemporary audience is more accustomed to film, the balconies provided a venue to stage the events described in the offstage action: the Bakkhai attacking the herds, and the murder of Pentheus. It also provided a prime location for my percussionists to perform and join in the action and, in conjunction with the scaffolding on the set, allowed Dionysus access to ascend and descend from the "heavens" to earth. In the production meetings I had recounted the myth of Kadmus slaying the serpent Orphis and how revenge for that murder might be a larger motive for the horrors of the play, especially when Dionysus decrees that Kadmus and his wife will be turned to snakes. When I expressed to Professor Edwards that I would like to reference the snake imagery somehow, he combined that with my separate request to add some visual feature at the top of set. When I saw the completed model, it included a large snake skeleton suspended above the audience, with bits of rotting "skin" hanging down. Here was the idea of dismemberment embodied above the heads of "unseeing" humans below.

"Show us your long dress" (Williams 53)

Professor Sharon Sobel, whose experience with other Greek plays made her an ideal collaborator, designed costumes for the production. I expressed to her my concern that the production should not look like a "toga party," nor did it even have to fit into the realm of what the average person might consider Classical Greek costume. She agreed, and supplied me with a number of visual resources to spark my interest. The Bakkhai are called "Asian, "which contemporary audiences would associate with China or Japan, but for the ancient Greeks, Asia is what we would now call the Middle East. Rather than limit the look to a specific region, inspiration came from all of these geographic possibilities. Professor Sobel designed the costumes around the two worlds of Pentheus and Dionysus we defined in production conferences.

This translated into asymmetrical, Eastern-inspired costumes in purples, greens and saffrons for Dionysus and his followers (the colors of grapes). By contrast, Pentheus, Kadmus and the guards were in more Westernized, symmetrical, tailored grey and black uniforms, though Kadmus wore an asymmetrical mantle over his uniform and a wreath on his head in deference to Dionysus. The blind prophet Tiresius and the Herdsman, who moved between the two worlds, were clad in rough, earth-toned fabrics. Agave, who is mother to Pentheus but enthralled to Dionysus, wore a dress inspired by a contemporary Japanese design with a sturdy wire bodice. It had the symmetry of Pentheus'

world but the lush purple color, freedom of movement and ivy head wreath that marked her as a follower of Dionysus. Dionysus and his followers all wore similar head wreaths to show their allegiance to the god.

While Classical theatre utilized masks for the performers, the designs reduced this to a half-mask for lead characters. The Chorus stippled dark purple makeup on their upper faces, while the guards of Pentheus had geometric black makeup reminiscent of Navy SEALS. While inspired from multiple cultures and eras, the limited color palette and contrasts of symmetry vs. asymmetry in the costumes made evident the allegiances and tensions between the worlds of Pentheus and Dionysus. Pictures from the production are included in the appendix.

"O Light, without you there was no dance" (Williams 41)

Professor Steven Williams executed the lighting design. Having designed in the space many times, I was able to give him the freedom to "go crazy," since this was lighting for the ritual of *The Bakkhai*, not naturalistic lighting indicating time of day. Instead, the design embodied the opposing forces, providing white, more clinical lighting when Pentheus is in control, but exploding into color and moving lights when Dionysus is dominant. It was rock concert lighting, supporting mood and text rather than illuminating faces. I knew little would be clear with lighting until we entered the theatre for rehearsals, but trusted Professor Williams to create a design supportive of the approach I had put forth.

He visited rehearsals frequently and I gave him free rein to experiment in those rehearsals long before we reached tech week.

EXPANDING THE TRIBE

The notion of ritual dismemberment was exacerbated by the many choices to be made in this production and prompted me to further share the leadership between myself, the assistant director, the percussion leader and the movement coordinator. My assistant director, Bethany Felts, was chosen for several reasons. One of the more mature students, she had a strong background in Greek mythology, so she not only knew the play; she helped the cast understand the myths connected to the text. An accomplished scholar as well, Bethany used my research and her own library to provide a glossary and pronunciation guide for the cast and helped me with dramaturgical questions. She had also worked with all of the other faculty directors as assistant director or actor, and those experiences, combined with her coursework in the movement, voice and auditioning classes, made her savvy as to the abilities and work habits of the students in the department and thus, an invaluable resource. I felt confident she could help me train the cast and in fact, much of the repetitive work with the chorus fell to her.

From my first moments of considering directing *The Bakkhai*, I knew percussion would be an important part of the production. While I had a dance background I was accustomed to creating dance to music. Given the limited

resources of a student-directed production, I decided live percussion would better serve the text than recorded music. To this end, I asked Vincent Carlson, one of the undergraduates, to join the team as percussionist and sound designer. He had already expressed interest in the show, telling me point blank that he wanted to play Dionysus. I made clear that his role as percussionist would not preclude playing Dionysus, but neither would it guarantee it. Certainly, he was a possible candidate for the part but auditions would be his chance to earn it.

Given the chance to work on sound, Vince flung himself into the task. He brought me samples of recorded drumming (much of which was eventually included in the preshow music) and I shared similar recordings with him. From these we determined styles of percussion that prompted a strong response in both of us. To distinguish between the opposing forces at play, Vince suggested a syncopated rhythm for moments relating to Dionysus and a more rigid, militaristic style for Pentheus. To supply the percussion, Vince built plywood drum boxes, rather than using existing drums. This allowed him a greater control of the look and sound of the drums. At my suggestion, Vince also agreed to lead a percussion workshop during finals week in December. This was intended to stir excitement for the production, determine which students had the most potential as percussionists and also relieve tension at the end of the semester. While only about ten students attended, it did give us a great

sense of their abilities and most of those who attended were cast. Vince and I were pleased with the results and I asked him to lead a similar session during the auditions.

On a similar tack, I invited Deborah Radloff, a senior, to serve as Movement Coordinator. An experienced dancer with a background in musical theatre, Deb would help introduce the essence of the Humphrey-Weidman technique to the cast and function as an additional set of eyes on the production. Like Vince, she was interested in being cast and agreed to the same terms: it was a possibility, but not a guarantee.

In preparation for her duties, I gave Deb books on Humphrey-Weidman dance technique and asked her to watch the Ririe-Woodbury videos on Dance Improvisation. I also gave her the published notes on performing an early Doris Humphrey piece, "Greek Sacrificial Dance." Since I wanted to adapt it and include it in our performance, Deb seemed the best choice to help me teach it to the cast and identify needed changes. I also gave her the materials on Charles Weidman from Professor Josie Metal-Corbin, who was on my thesis committee. While I did not intend for all the dances to be strictly Humphrey-Weidman, I knew Deb's enthusiasm and knowledge would help suffuse the movement with energy and perhaps be influenced by their technique.

AUDITIONS, CALLBACKS AND CASTING

Auditions consisted of students performing two monologues: one from Noel Coward, the other from a classical Greek Drama. Some actors used this time to indicate whether their interest lay more in *The Bakkhai* or the other production that semester, *Blithe Spirit*. While knowing the student body allowed me to have actors in mind for the parts, auditions certainly complicated matters, with several actors demonstrating their capability for the few lead roles available. The evening of callbacks allowed me to narrow down these choices, as well as determine who might be well suited for the demands of the Chorus. It also permitted the actors to create movements that could be used in the staging of the text itself.

Initially for the callback session I led the actors through a warm-up, including varying their tempo as they walked in a circle. This allows relaxation to take over and tunes them in to functioning as a group, raising their awareness of each other. Following this, I modified an exercise from Grotowski, having them face each other in two lines. Then, I requested they perform a "mating dance" for each other, first as a snake, then as a cow or bull and finally as a large jungle cat. This warmed them up physically as well as vocally, as they could only perform their dance in place and utilize the noise made by their respective animals. It also connected them to their potential "mate," as I asked the actors to note and adjust their movements based on the reaction received from the

opposite line. This exercise achieved several things. It demonstrated which actors were comfortable moving in a sensual, even potentially embarrassing way (an important consideration when much of the text focuses on the release of societal restrictions). It displayed a willingness to commit and become part of a crowd/group identity. It also created some potentially useful movements for the production, especially since the bull, snake and lion are all totemic animals associated as forms of Dionysus.

Having completed this task, those auditioning were divided into groups by Bethany Felts, my assistant director, and given a Composition exercise to create a movement piece. Composition, as defined by director Tina Landau:

> is a method for revealing to ourselves our hidden thoughts and feelings about the material. Because we usually make Compositions in rehearsal in an unbelievably short amount of time (anywhere from three minutes to half an hour), we have no time to think. Composition provides a structure for working from our impulses and intuition . . . The assignment will usually include an overall intention or structure as well as a substantial list of ingredients which must be included . . . (Landau 26-27)

My tasks for the composition were chosen to introduce the notion of ritual dismemberment, examine its physical manifestations and explore the connections between *The Bakkhai* and the plot of 20th century musicals like

The Music Man and *Footloose*. (See Appendix for the Composition parameters given to those auditioning). By the same token, the text chosen as one of the ingredients was Adler and Ross's song "Once a Year-Day" from *The Pajama Game* (see Appendix for complete lyric). While set in Iowa of the 1950s, the lyric speaks of an annual day of release, when laws of moral propriety do not apply, thus functioning as a modern festival of Dionysus. In addition to creating potential movements, the Composition exercise allows performers to create without conscious illustration of a moment of text.

The results of the Composition exercise both told me about the actors auditioning and revealed things about the text and its staging. One actor took control of his group, imposing his vision, ignoring suggestions, giving himself the most text and the most to do, including a strong entrance he denied the other actors. Since he seemed more excited about featuring himself than contributing to the group of the process, I chose to do without him. Another actor was dependent on her group to tell her what to do, never venturing to create on her own, only mimicking others and never matching them in energy or commitment. While I did elect to use her, she was never as strong as I wanted, and we spent many hours of rehearsals trying to increase the drama of her physicality and facial expressions.

Despite these exceptions, most of the other actors were very committed, and one even injured her knee and spent the first weeks of rehearsal on crutches (not an extreme I encouraged, but I admired her level of commitment). All the groups provided movement and staging ideas. They taught me that gesture and dance were dynamic techniques for suggesting dismemberment without fake blood or body parts. Specific moves were translated directly to the stage, including one we called "Kissin' Katie's ear," from the song lyric that accompanied it. The move consisted of a loose hand lifting past the ear, extending into an upright arm and then flowing downward, extending horizontally to the person next to them. Performed in succession, it would become part of the choreography the chorus enacted in the balconies of the theatre.

The moments the groups created from *Footloose* and *The Music Man* demonstrated the connection between these musicals and *The Bakkhai*. For a young university audience, they would provide a frame of reference for abandonment through music and dance. The actors' recreation of Kevin Bacon's dance from *Footloose* found it's way into my production as Dionysus sought to defy Pentheus, even as he was being led to prison. The movements created in the composition became a lexicon of gesture throughout the rehearsal process and we would often review them on videotape to help fill a moment. While something of a (dis)memberment of traditional callbacks, the Composition

forges ensembles and puts the focus on the play and the production, as well as aiding in casting decisions.

After performing the Composition pieces, I divided the group in two. Half went with Vince to experiment with percussion, while the rest stayed to read scenes. A few surprises emerged: though one of the reasons I had chosen the text was to utilize the women in the department in the chorus and to play Agave, two seniors, Deb Radloff and Sarah Brown, both asked to be considered for Dionysus, a role they both read well. I was also impressed by the work of Nick Mazucca. I had seen him struggle to express emotion in acting classes, but he gave a moving reading of Kadmus in the scene where he informs Agave of her actions. While some actors seemed to hate classical drama, others were inspired and rose to the challenge.

After the initial auditions, I was confused due to the number of good performances. However, the callback readings and the Composition work provided needed clarity as to people's abilities. I selected Vincent Carlson and Kevin Bensley to play Dionysus and Pentheus, respectively. Especially since the percussionists would be a group of four satyrs, followers of Dionysus, it made sense to make Vince their leader figuratively and literally. By the same token, Kevin's experience as an actor with much community experience and a relative newcomer to the department would (I hoped) lend some power to Pentheus, to balance out the greater stage time given to Dionysus. Deb Radloff was cast as

Agave for her physicality, strength and mature look, while Sarah Brown's powerful voice, ease of movement and commitment level made her the obvious choice for the Chorus Leader. Both women could have played Dionysus and while I had considered fragmenting the part, having him played by two or three actors, the number of actors auditioning was less than I had initially expected, deterring such a technique. Deb would later successfully argue for more stage time for Agave, while Sarah's Chorus Leader managed to suggest the presence of Dionysus, even when the character was absent from the stage. Adam Scarpello was chosen for the Herdsman and Konrad Case selected for Pentheus' guard, who relates the story of his death. Both actors seemed capable of handling storytelling monologues, which would be contrasted with their stories being enacted in the balconies by the chorus. For the two old men, Kadmus and Tiresius, I selected Nick Mazucca and Nick Zadina, who proved to me through callbacks that they could find both the humor and the emotional weight of their characters. After consultation with Vince, we selected four men to serve as our percussionist satyr chorus. The larger chorus was an ensemble of eight (nine with the Chorus Leader), comprised of a mix of genders, ethnicities and experience levels. Together, the cast numbered 21 and I was excited to begin rehearsal the following week.

REHEARSALS BEGIN

The first read-through of the text clarified several things for me. While a short read (about one hour and fifteen minutes), I felt certain that movement would add time, so I inserted an intermission. In addition, while the initial speech of Dionysus is considered a Prologue, I began the performance before that, with a movement prologue. This prologue was added for several reasons. It allowed a brief visual depiction of the hierarchy in Thebes before the arrival of Dionysus, unmitigated by spoken text, depicting Pentheus as King with his mother Agave, presiding over the people; the Guards serving Pentheus and maintaining order; and the Chorus as the lowest citizens of Thebes: the slave women, foreigners and outcasts forced to mine for precious metals to benefit Pentheus and his family. This scenario is borrowed from playwright Wole Soyinka, who, in his introduction his adaptation of *The Bakkhai*, wrote of the shift from agrarian to mining activity in Greek culture. In addition, Deborah Radloff had requested more stage time for Agave, since Euripides' does not present her until she enters with the head of her son. This added sequence also took into account a contemporary audience, for many films now begin with an "action" sequence before the narrative details are related. Rather than beginning with Dionysus speaking, the audience was visually introduced to the other characters.

This sequence was staged about two weeks into rehearsals. First,

Deb Radloff taught the actors a few quick basics of the Humphrey-Weidman technique, emphasizing the principles of Fall and Recovery. Once they had some of these moves in their vocabulary, I divided them into two groups and had them rough out their mining actions, using the Humphrey-Weidman moves. This turned into a show-and-tell session, where they critiqued each other, selecting the strong movements, improving the mediocre and eliminating the weak ones. They taught these improved versions to each other, finally combining them into a group sequence. (This technique proved effective throughout rehearsals, creating a competition that was then transformed into a collaboration).

While Deb and I were busy with the Chorus, Vincent Carlson worked with the guards and percussionists, creating a strong, militant rhythm to embody the control of Pentheus, which the percussionists could violate by syncopating it into a Dionysian dance beat. In another corner, Bethany Felts prepared Pentheus and Agave to enter as a royal family, keep their workers in line and then part ways. When combined, these efforts provided a vibrant beginning to the performance.

Summoned by a steady, pounding rhythm, set by the guards, the Chorus entered as the weary slaves of Thebes, forced to form a circle and depict mining actions. Pentheus entered with his mother, Agave, to review and supervise the slaves before embarking on a journey. This allowed mother and son a "happy" moment together (they are not seen in the play together until after Pentheus'

death) and allowed the audience to visually connect the two. Following Pentheus' departure, the lighting became more colorful and the percussionists began a syncopated rhythm to contrast the guards' steady beat. Enthralled by Dionysus, the slaves ceased working and began to rebel, breaking formation and dancing. Even Agave was affected, and though the guards attempted to take control, the chorus broke free and chased them away. After this added sequence, Dionysus entered in the traditional *prologus* to explain all that had occurred before the play began. This combination of mime, dance and percussion set the style of the production and provided a suitably dramatic build-up for the first spoken words, "I am Dionysus."

"The eye is faster than the ear" (Humphrey 159)

When staging the spoken text of *The Bakkhai* the movement was created before the lines were learned, or rather, simultaneously and separately. As in musical theatre, there were vocal rehearsals dealing only with spoken text, in which the Chorus members were split into groups so lines could be assigned and dynamics developed. Bethany Felts, the Assistant Director, who was well versed in vocal techniques, mythology and pronunciation of Greek names, largely oversaw these text-based rehearsals. The movement was created separately, supervised by a Movement Coordinator Deb Radloff and myself, or in rehearsal, using exercises borrowed from Viewpoints, LeCoq, and Ririe-Woodbury dance improvisation as well as Humphrey-Weidman. The movement was created in

silence, or to recorded music chosen for mood or tempo, and often was joined to a score of percussion created by Vincent Carlson. As movement patterns were choreographed and learned, the stage manager, Suzanne Withem, would read the text, allowing me to edit for adjustments in gesture and tempo. It was especially helpful that Withem was an actor herself, as a strong reading of the text helped the actors with dynamics and provided an emotional music to accompany the dances. Only later did actors perform the lines with their movement, creating a disconnect that brought both text and movement to life, without the need for one to illustrate the other.

SUPRENANT'S MUSIC/TEXT/SUBSTITUTION

This technique is one I first observed while stage managing Dr. Susann Suprenant's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* at UNO. A piece of music is played while the actors improvise a series of movements, shapes or gestures. Before beginning, the actors are given some guidelines or limitations by the director (or others) to both inspire and focus the movements. This can be an action (to control, to repair, to protect, etc.), a restriction (don't look at each other, no arms, etc.) or attention to a shape or pattern. For example, I asked Kevin Bensley, the actor playing Pentheus, to make his actions symmetrical, angular and rapid, while his action was "to control." By contrast, Vincent Carlson (Dionysus) was told to move asymmetrically and fluidly, utilizing

curved movements and shapes, while attempting to undermine Pentheus. Working through and to some recorded music (*not* usually utilized in the show), the actors create a physical composition independent of the text. Moving through the music in short, repeated segments, usually a minute or less, the physical score was created, repeated, and after Bethany or I made suggestions, adjusted until it was committed to memory. Once it was set, it was repeated to the music, and then performed silently and only after that was the text for the scene utilized. However, rather than being spoken by the actors, the text was performed by the stage management team, as an auditory counterpoint to the movement, like the music. Only then is it revealed which movement corresponds to which line. Sometimes timing was changed to correspond with a line, sometimes not. Rather than the movement illustrating the text, it functions much like director Robert Wilson describes his own work: "like a silent movie and a radio show are playing at the same time" (Bly 63).

The resulting scene was exciting and playful. It was eerie to see how much the movement score illuminated, contrasted and "danced" with the text, resulting in unexpected moments. For example, Dionysus lunging at Pentheus, then falling like an undulating jungle cat at his feet was better than any blocking I could have devised. Most of the non-chorus moments were staged this way, and some of the chorus staging as well, resulting in unusual moves and patterns bound much more to ritual than reality.

"Movement looks slower and weaker on stage"

(Humphrey 159)

One Chorus movement sequence proved too difficult for the actors to perform when the rhythm of the spoken text was added. It was a crucial moment in the script, just before an earthquake occurs, where energy and tension needed to build. The Chorus was moving through the space in a modified version of "Follow the Leader," striking the ground with their *thyrsi*—the wooden staffs that marked them as followers of Dionysus. To begin with, the chorus had been striking the ground repeatedly throughout, but the sound was so strong the lines were overpowered. The ground strike was changed to the first beat of a four count, but this caused confusion in timing when the chorus began speaking rather than the stage manager. It became one of those frustrating and exciting moments in rehearsal when everyone's ideas were attempted, and nothing worked.

We changed the beginning to start with the thyrsus-strike on the four-count as the chorus walked in their snaking pattern through the space. This preceded the spoken text and they used the other three beats to switch hands and strike the ground on the other side. While their spoken text requested the god's intervention, the sameness of movement brought to mind the more rational god Apollo, rather than Dionysus. It was too even-keeled, symmetrical and safe. Simplification of the movement pattern strengthened the sequence

but did not solve all the problems. Even with the addition of a gradually increasing tempo, the sequence did not build sufficiently to reach the required frenzy before the earthquake. Given my production concept that *The Bakkhai* takes dismemberment as its subject and embodies it in structure, plot and text, this choral ode was too whole and of a piece. It needed disruption and dynamic contrast.

"Monotony is fatal; look for contrasts"

(Humphrey 159)

Ultimately, the source of the needed contrast was the Chorus themselves. At a previous rehearsal, the Assistant Director, Stage Manager and the Chorus had staged another, later choral sequence from the beginning of Act Two. I had requested that they work within their smaller, three-person groups, emphasizing the range of actions available with their *thyrsi* and avoiding circle configurations. This, too, suffered from monotony and predictability. Thyrsi and actors danced together, forming rings and lines to dance around, crashing together and brushing the ground, but the actors had formed a series of triangular formations—essentially a circle formed with three people, and all in the center of the space and at the same level. Faced with the result, I had applauded their efforts but warned them the sequence would need modification.

Operating from the notion of (dis)memberment and Humphrey's suggestion of contrasts, combining the two sets of movements provided the

needed momentum. The action now alternated the walking/spoken sequences throughout the space with more violent small groups coming center stage to clash with their *thyrsi*, accompanied by shouts, yowls and heavily syncopated drumbeats. Each spoken section was taken at an increasingly faster tempo and finally the chorus broke into three snaking lines just before the earthquake. The struggle between the rational Apollonian and the irrational Dionysian became embodied in this sequence.

"Don't intellectualize; motivate movement"

(Humphrey 159)

The only drawback to utilizing the movement created for the top of Act Two during this Act One sequence, was how to stage the Chorus at that later moment. Having inserted the intermission at the end of the dialogue where Dionysus invites Pentheus to observe the Bakkhai in the mountains, the Chorus moment was (in musical theatre terms) the "opening number" of Act Two. Keeping the structure of a musical in mind, this "number" typically sets the mood, reminds the audience where the narrative left off and points the way to the action to follow. Yet the text of the Chorus was somber in tone and reflective, asking when they will leave the confines of the city and celebrate in the open air again. This is in sharp contrast to the scene following, where Pentheus, dressed a woman, is trained by Dionysus how to act like one of the Bakkhai before Dionysus leads Pentheus off to be killed. I struggled to imagine

the sort of movement that would prepare the audience for this darkly comic scene, while maintaining the serious tone of the choral text. Further complicating matters, Sarah Brown, the Chorus Leader and Deb Radloff, my Movement Coordinator, were scheduled to be out of town when we restaged the scene, so I would have neither the key actor in the scene, nor the person best suited to help me devise movement. Remembering Koszyn's article about the Irrational, I decided this was "the will of the gods," suspended any rational search for an answer and trusted it would arrive. The needed splash of inspiration presented itself the morning before the rehearsal. Bethany Felts, my assistant director, knocked on my office door with a gift. Originally intended for opening night, she gave me the book *Ritual Sacrifice* by Brenda Ralph Lewis, an international history of sacrificial practices.

I eagerly turned to the chapter describing the practices of Greece, seeking distraction more than anything. Yet there was the inspiration I sought for the scene in question:

> The animal was led to the altar, usually in procession accompanied by music, and its head was sprinkled with water. If the animal tossed its head in response—a natural reaction—this was taken as the creature's 'assent' to its own death. The participants prayed to the god, and then threw the handfuls of barley at the animal in a gesture that symbolized the act of violence would follow. (51-52)

I realized that in an attempt to logically provide variety, even entertainment, I had allowed the religious aspects of the ritual to fall away. This description provided the framework for staging the scene.

Drawing from Lewis' description, I was able to stage the beginning of Act One quickly at that night's rehearsal. I served as Chorus Leader in Sarah's absence, much as Euripides and other classical playwrights served as director for their texts. The lines had already been split between three groups of chorus members and I instructed them to seek out small objects in the space (like the handfuls of barley in Lewis' description) as a contribution to the ritual as they spoke their lines. While they incanted the text and brought offerings, I gestured over a scrap of fabric, summoning the gods to punish Pentheus for his offenses against Dionysus, as the text now made clear:

it

happens sometimes

so

slowly, the power

of the gods, but

it does, then,

stir, does

come

to pass, and,

inexorably, comes

to punish

humans (Williams 54)

Gathering the objects into the cloth, it became a tool of the ritual like the water daubed on the sacrificial bull, proving its power as it touched each chorus member, finally utilized by Dionysus to anoint and decorate the human animal Pentheus as he was sent off to slaughter. When next in rehearsal, I taught the ritual to Sarah Brown, the Chorus Leader. In performance the moment fulfilled its purpose: reminding us of the Act One conclusion, setting up the scene to follow, establishing the serious ritualistic tone to contrast the following comic exchange. Dionysus had won out over Apollo's logic once again.

"Listen to qualified advice; don't be arrogant"

(Humphrey 159)

Qualified advice, in my case, meant my collaborators, thesis committee and outside observers and speakers. While the contributions of my cast, stage manager, assistant director, percussion leader and movement director were invaluable, it was the advice of those intermittent visitors that provided inspiration and insight.

I would check in almost daily with my Dr. Suprenant. She had directed several of the same students before and her insights were most helpful. At an early rehearsal when we were working with the thyrsi, Dr. Suprenant pointed out

how dangerous one of the chorus members was, that his actions would injure anyone sitting in the front rows. I warned him of this and made clear that we would shorten his thyrsus if more care weren't taken. This also prompted me to place the stage management team in the front rows, extending their legs and shouting out if anyone's thyrsus came too near. Not only did this increase safety, it also restricted the playing space, forcing the chorus to operate more as a unit in a smaller space.

For an outside eye, I relied on David Johnson, an old friend with some theatrical experience but a stronger background in music and specifically drum and bugle corps. Since he had little experience with Greek drama, he visited rehearsals as my ideal audience member: educated but not sure what to expect. He gave me notes on plot points that were confusing and movements that were unclear. Rather than suggesting changes, his notes often indicated to me earlier moments that set up a scene, which had become rushed or muddied. In addition, his notes provided an additional point of view when multiple things were occurring onstage. He also served as a cheering section when to my eyes everything was "horrible."

Equally important were the visits from Dr. Cindy Melby Phaneuf and Professor Josie Metal-Corbin, my other thesis committee members. On their first visit, they pointed out the difficulties of hearing and understanding the chorus.

This was a timely reminder as so much effort was going into the smaller scenes and incorporating them with the chorus movement and percussion.

I had followed the advice of translator C. K. Williams, whose introduction asserted, "human beings don't seem able to speak in real unison; we can do so only when we have music to order ourselves through, the abyss of time" (xvii) While Williams suggests dividing the lines among individual performers, the size of the space made it difficult to hear them. Instead, I divided the chorus into three groups of three, only occasionally designating key lines be spoken by the group in unison or singly, by the Chorus Leader.

Reminded of this desire for clarity by my committee, I sat down with the Chorus and worked with them to achieve the dynamics of vocal variety. The choices were actually obvious, the translation lending itself to sensual whispers, thunderous shouts and moments of staccato consonants. Once I worked through the first choral ode, the process was fairly self-explanatory and I left the rest for my Assistant Director and the chorus themselves to figure out. While I would give additional notes, the results were much stronger, though not perfect.

It was nearing tech week when I noticed the base elements of earth, air, fire and water seemed to be missing, though we had discussed them at early rehearsals, and I had pointed how frequently they pop up in the text. I had done extensive work with them in Dr. Phaneuf's Ensemble Acting class, but with so many other things to attend to, their effect had dissipated.

I mentioned this lack to Dr. Suprenant on my way to rehearsal, wondering if she could suggest an exercise. She reminded me of a similar challenge she had directing *The Skin of Our Teeth* where she had instructed an actor to incorporate different emotional qualities we labeled on the floor into the staging of a long monologue. Susann suggested using a similar technique, since we had already assigned a different element to each corner of the playing space. Having scribbled these ideas down, I dashed to rehearsal, and put this "exercise" into practice. Dividing the cast into four groups, each was placed in a corner labeled earth, air, water and fire. They were instructed to individually or as a group move and make sounds (no words) as their element. They created sounds and movements of rockslides, tidal waves, raging fires and rushing winds. Then I instructed them to move from their corners toward the other groups to mingle elements. As fire met water and became steam, air whipped earth into a dust storm, until all the elements intertwined. This exercise bolstered the vocal and physical energy so much that after that time if the actors seemed complacent and relaxed, I could shout "Elements" and the degree of conflict would arise, enlivening the ritual.

For me, "qualified advice" also translated into qualified help. A focal point of Euripides text and my thesis is the dismemberment of Pentheus by the Bakkhai. Following Greek tradition, Euripides places this act offstage, where it is described by one of Pentheus' guards. Acknowledging a 21st century audience,

I chose to have the chorus depict the action in the balconies that surround the theatre. As with other offstage moments, two groups of chorus members performed on opposite balconies so it would be visible to all audience members. On one side the actors playing Pentheus and Agave portrayed themselves, reciting their lines in conjunction with the guard quoting them. On the opposite side two silent chorus members performed their roles.

Having seen this moment in a few rehearsals, Professor Josie Metal-Corbin pointed out a problem with the staging: the movement was too soft, too lyrical and too realistic for the sudden violence the ritual implied. While I agreed, I also felt a sense of panic, as we were entering tech week. She graciously offered to help me re-choreograph. In order not to alarm the cast, we decided to use as much of the existing movement as possible. The actors were called in early and we made modifications as our crew prepared the theatre for rehearsal. Josie demonstrated the use of energy, contractions and breath to create stronger postures and more effective shapes. In addition, we utilized a few movements used at other times or created in the callback composition exercise, thus continuing the vocabulary throughout. The result was not only ritualistic, it created images like those on ancient Greek pottery, but they changed like a 21st century slide show, thus embodying the postmodern aspects of ritual (dis)memberment. It also served to contrast the guard on the theatre floor below, relating the story to the Chorus Leader, who was witness to his anguish,

moving and dancing in response to his report. Josie's hands-on advice helped when no additional notes could.

"Don't be a slave to, or a mutilator of, the music"

(Humphrey 159)

The dance section added for the chorus was based on Doris Humphrey's choreography for "Greek Sacrificial Dance," choreographed in 1916. Having been trained in the Humphrey-Weidman technique during my undergraduate education, I had already chosen to use elements of the technique for staging the Chorus movement. This use of "Greek Sacrificial Dance" allowed for a time of Humphrey-inspired movement unmitigated by speech. It also allowed the Bakkhai a method of honoring Agave's loss, hearkening back to the mimed section at the top of the show when she became part of the group. It was only later, reading Paul Roche's translation of Euripides that he suggested there was a Choral Ode missing at this point in the text. Instinctually, I had compensated for this lost chorus moment, though I had inserted dance as text, rather than inventing words as he does in his translation.

The "Greek Sacrificial Dance" was appealing from its title, and the steps Humphrey created years ago were appropriate for this moment in the production. Adaptation of the choreography was immediately necessary, as Humphrey had employed nineteen dancers, choreographed for a proscenium stage, while the Chorus of *The Bakkhai* numbered only nine and were performing

in the round. Some might argue against using the choreography in such a scenario, yet Humphrey's design provided strong contrast of slow and quick movements and juxtaposed solo dancers with ensemble action, creating a lively somberness, respecting the moment without slowing the progression of the performance. The structure of the choreography provided an Apollonian framework, while the adjustments to number of performers and arena staging proffered Dionysian resistance, ultimately leading to a moment when the recorded choreography was discarded.

"A good ending is forty percent of the dance . . ."

(Humphrey 159)

The reassembly of the body of Pentheus is one of the most artistically and emotionally challenging moments in *The Bakkhai*. Contemporary American culture is uncomfortable with death and this discomfort haunted the scene for both actors and audience. Focusing on ritual (dis)memberment, I chose to stage this scene more symbolically than realistically. Having rejected the notion of authentic looking body parts, I chose instead to have them depicted as pieces of a classical sculpture, which seemed more appropriate for a ritual. The use of sculpture referenced the age and origins of the text, but abstracted the (dis)memberment in a way that would (I hoped) avoid laughter or disgust from the audience. Unfortunately, the undergraduate prop master avoided production

meetings and sought out shortcuts to do his work as quickly as possible. While the other props were presentable, a lack of discussion and his unwillingness to communicate meant that I was facing tech week with unworkable (even laughable) "body parts." They were flat Styrofoam pieces cut out in cartoonish versions of a hand or a foot. I was surprised, since the other props created (including the head of Pentheus) had been striking and appropriate. While preferring to give my collaborators free rein, I was frustrated with the handling of these critical pieces, and like Pentheus, I felt angry at my inability to control the situation. However, unlike Pentheus, the stage manager, Suzanne Withem, and I took matters into our own hands. Drawing on my technical theatre background and her experience with the department, she suggested we utilize a fake body left from another production. I quickly severed it into pieces. Suzanne disposed of the flat pieces and left a message for the prop master to make the new pieces match the head he had built. Again, this is not my ideal working environment, but given little time or recourse, it seemed the only solution. In retrospect, it was another instance of (dis)memberment: the failure to communicate had resulted in the properties master being cut off from the process.

Even with the appropriate pieces, staging the scene was a difficult balance of emotion and efficiency. This was one of the few moments I blocked a scene in the traditional sense. When the actors attempted to improvise the action, it

proved problematic. At first Nick Mazucca (Kadmus) would stand up and walk to retrieve each body part and then kneel down to put it in place on the burial dais, making the reassembly awkward and interminable. When asked to stay kneeling and hand each piece to Deb Radloff (Agave), Nick reassembled the body in assembly-line fashion, quickly placing head, torso, arms, pelvis and legs in place in comical record time. Finally, when instructed to combine efficiency with confusion and reverence, he discovered the proper balance. The Kadmus he displayed knew his grisly task, but still had to sadly sort through his grandson's remains to identify them. This gave Agave (Deb) time to acknowledge and lament her son's body before covering it with her veil.

In addition to the challenge of the staging, this moment had stymied me as to the appropriate musical accompaniment. The drumming had ceased when Agave realized Pentheus was dead, returning only to accompany Agave singing a lament while the chorus danced the "Greek Sacrificial Dance." However, for reassembling the body, it seemed that drumming would irreverently force the action forward. By the same token, silence seemed insufficient. Having watched the basics of the scene, Vince Carlson asked to try something out with the percussionists. He would not reveal his idea, but as I was busy polishing the blocking, I agreed.

During the next run-through, as the funeral dais was placed stage center and Agave and Kadmus knelt to their task, whistling rang out through the space. It was not happy whistling, nor was it a recognizable tune. Instead, it was long, mournful, breathy notes, often clashing in tone, with each percussionist beginning on a different pitch, sounding somewhat like wind blowing through the trees. Coming from above the audience on all sides, it was a haunting and heartbreaking reminder of the grief and regret felt by Kadmus and Agave. Vince's choice was an excellent one and my trust in my collaborators was proven to be well placed.

"Don't leave the ending to the end" (Humphrey 159)

Despite some last-minute adjustments to the staging, the final week of rehearsals was relatively calm. Beyond the problems with the prop body parts, the other technical elements were in good shape. The atmosphere was positive and focused.

The lighting was easily incorporated, since I had encouraged Professor Williams to experiment with cues in earlier rehearsals. While initially this distracted from the action, it seemed to aid the actors' performances, as it added to the mood of each scene. As a result, by tech week I had seen most of the light cues and most of the adjustments were to their timing and placement. Perhaps the biggest change was due to a "happy accident." While reversing cues during dry tech, I remarked to Professor that the flashing from

the automated lights looked like lightning. He enthusiastically agreed and added similar flashes to the two moments of lightning in the production. These moments became some of my favorites in the show.

This set was in place and usable well before technical rehearsals. This was exciting for everyone, as we were able to explore and utilize its possibilities throughout the rehearsal process. Indeed, the majority of rehearsals took place in the theatre, circumventing any major adjustments that occur when the set is more complicated. Granted, Professor Edwards and the crew could not complete the snake carcass until tech week, but as it was overhead, it only meant adjustments to lighting and did not affect the actors' work.

The addition of costumes and makeup was a boon for the cast, solidifying the roles enlivening the world we had created. Sharon had to make some minor alterations to allow for movement, but as there were almost no costume changes, she and her crew could focus on aesthetics. Furthermore, since the masks had been provided halfway into rehearsals, adjustments to them had already been made, so there was no sudden acclimation for the actors to make before performances. The colors and shapes of the costumes were a rich addition to our ritual.

The use of live percussion meant the soundscape was virtually in place throughout rehearsals. The only additions were recorded music added for pre-show, intermission and post-show, a pre-show announcement and one moment

during the earthquake that needed a microphone. While adjusting timing and levels for those moments were somewhat problematic, there was no undue stress, since the other technical aspects were firmly in place.

These trouble-free technical rehearsals were ideal. It allowed focus on performances and staging and while there were many notes to deal with, there were no especially late nights, leaving the cast and crew well rested. Even the curtain call was in working order, since I had staged it at one of the first rehearsals, while we were all still fresh. It seemed we were in good shape and could look forward to adding the final element—audience reaction.

Chapter Five:
"real gods require blood"
The Fires of Reaction

When a production enters the performance stage, it is often the most volatile. It can ignite something in an audience, but like any fire, confusion and (artistic) damage can occur and the director has no control. This chapter documents the fires of media, peer, student and personal directorial reactions to *The Bakkhai*. The following assesses which ideas burned bright, which fizzled out and what new learning and growth can emerge from the ashes.

NEWSPAPER REACTION

There was one review of the production by Warren Francke of *The Daily Nonpareil* (the full review is included in the Appendix). His review begins, "They're doing this sexy, violent musical at the University of Nebraska at Omaha." He goes on to summarize the plot and express his desire for nudity. Francke admits being confused: "For most of the first act, it was all Greek to me. But the Bakkhai do some bumping, grinding and moaning, and director Ron Zant [sic] deserves an audience for his in-the-round interpretation of the ancients." I was glad to see him compliment my collaborators' work on set, percussion and movement, but while he described the costumes, neither Sharon Sobel nor the lighting by Steven Williams was mentioned.

Regarding the performances, Francke remarks on difficulties hearing and comprehending voices (concerns I shared). The concept behind the movement,

Francke said, "wasn't clear at all," which some students remarked on as well in their critiques. However, one person sought me out after a performance and remarked that he loved the boxy way Pentheus moved, that it really contrasted with Dionysus. Moreover, the sideways shuffle I gave to Tiresius was stolen from Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey's collaborator, and was the only moment of purely Weidman movement in the entire evening. This is not meant to discard Francke's criticism, but it was heartening to hear an audience member see the same movement and tell her friend, "That's how my Grandpa moves."

Perhaps the most interesting assessment of Francke's review were his remarks on a minor production choice:

> Amidst all the awesome atmospherics appears a shrine cordoned off with yellow crime scene tape. Ready to flee at intermission, the reviewer consulted with two gray eminences who've attended hundreds of plays over the last half century. The three of us agreed that, yes, that was yellow crime scene tape, and that its anachronistic meaning was quite apparent. To the director at least. (Francke 1)

I *did* think the meaning apparent, since Dionysus says in his opening monologue, "I praise Cadmus. He made the ruins hallowed ground, dedicated to his daughter" (Williams 3). Todd Edwards and I had discussed how to cordon

off the ruins and the police tape seemed a logical choice within the world of the design, since someone had died in the ruins and it was a marker our audience would recognize from contemporary culture. It could be considered anachronistic, but the costumes were as well, as was the scaffolding and I-beams included in the set, the spears carried by the guards in SWAT-team uniforms and the preshow announcement where "Zeus" threatened the audience with lightning if they failed to turn off their cell phones. Certainly, anachronisms are a concern if a production is set in a particular historical period, but that was not my goal and it seems I did not announce that clearly enough to Mr. Francke. Or did I? His review could be labeled postmodern, since it includes discussions about classical theatre mixed with pop cultural phrases like, "it was all Greek to me," Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" and (my favorite), "Sock it to me, baby," a slogan that would likely be lost on most college-age audience members. Kathleen Bagby Coate, a friend and alum of the Theatre department, wrote a response online to Francke's review (included in the appendix) and defended the production and asking why critics did not educate themselves in different styles of theatre. I appreciated her kind words and but also feel that, in his own way, Francke was commending the production. In fact, the (unintentional) postmodern approach to the review, the positive comments toward the movement and drumming and Francke's labeling the show a musical suggests he understood the show more than he may have realized.

PEER RESPONSE

The comments from Kathleen Bagby Coate were just one example of the responses I received from peers and friends. Another alumnus of the Theatre department confessed the production was exciting but made him "horny," which I consider high praise for a performance based on a text over 2000 years old. English professor Julia Garrett told me it was much more engaging than the production of *Medea* she saw in New York with Diana Rigg. There seemed to be a wide range of reactions from the theatre faculty, from Dr. Suprenant announcing, "Yay, *Bakkhai*," to Dr. Doug Paterson telling me that some of it worked for him and some of it did not, to Dr. Phaneuf saying, "You must be very excited." This variety of responses is understandable with a varied range of educational backgrounds and personal definitions of good theatre, but they seemed generally pleased and indicated it was a good learning experience for all the students (myself included).

My friend Laurel Shoemaker, a professional lighting designer, attended a performance and was quite candid with opinions in an email, including her appreciation of Nick Mazucca as Kadmus: "(O)kay he was stiff and sort of presentational, but what a perfect part for someone like that, and we loved him because he was stiff." She, too, struggled with understanding the chorus, but she noted that by focusing on the movement, the meaning of the lines became clearer.

STUDENT RESPONSE

The production was not heavily attended, due in part (it would seem) to winter weather and little media coverage (one mention in a weekly newspaper). Nor is *The Bakkhai* a familiar name to community theatre audiences, who are seldom exposed to classical drama. Some audience members slept, others left during intermission and one couple bolted from a performance shortly after Dionysus entered, never to return. Certainly the bulk of the audience was from the university community, especially students from the Introduction to Theatre courses.

Some of the most interesting critiques came from the Introduction to Theatre class taught by Ms. Charleen Willoughby. I had spoken to them the week before the production opened, so I jumped when offered the chance to read their critiques of the show (had I thought of it, I would have asked to see critiques from other classes, to examine how students responded without my class visit). There responses were largely positive, though there were naysayers as well. Several were surprised how much they liked the arena setting, though some were uncomfortable being so close to the action, especially when the actors were moving through the aisles or whispering "Dionysus" from the edges of the space. They were generally complimentary toward the technical aspects, especially the lighting and costumes (due, I suspect, to Professor Williams' class visit and their knowledge that Ms. Willoughby worked in the costume shop).

Two students, however, were disappointed the overhead snake did not move and one woman was livid because Dionysus wore hoop earrings.

Their responses to the performances were amazing in their inconsistency. No actor was universally praised, and one student's favorite was the next student's object of derision. Several found the chorus difficult to understand, though I was pleased that some referred to the "singing" of the chorus, suggesting some of my musical theatre intentions rubbed off on their perceptions. The musical and dancing aspects were very popular, with positive comments on the drumming and multiple mentions that they liked the choice of Agave singing her lament, rather than realistically weeping.

DIRECTORIAL RESPONSE

I attended all of the performances, either as audience member or videotaping for my records. Overall, I was very proud of the work my cast and collaborators did, but there are things I would change if approaching another Greek play in the future. This includes not only my techniques in directing, but also my preparation and attention to the text.

Regarding my own analysis of the text, it would be beneficial to begin earlier. Especially when approaching the choral odes, I extended much energy just before or in rehearsals, attempting to penetrate the meaning and purpose of each passage. Even defining the functions of those sections (more than emotional or narrative meaning) would have eased the process. In addition,

scheduling worked against me. While five and one-half weeks are the standard within the department, for graduate directors who are less experienced (especially with challenging projects such as this one), an additional week might have meant a higher degree of polish. Rehearsal was also limited by the department's involvement in the American College Theatre Festival, which removed several actors at the beginning of the rehearsal process. I do not believe additional or longer rehearsals within the five and one-half weeks would have helped, since they would cause further drain on actor energy. In the current 2005-2006 season, the show scheduled in this time slot actually auditioned in the Fall semester, and for something like a classical Greek drama, this might have eased the rehearsal process, since memorization could take place sooner.

Examining the performances of the principal actors, I was very pleased, yet realize now the concentration on the physical production did not always allow time for the emotional content to be developed. I would like to direct *The Bakkhai* again and explore the emotional life further, specifically working on involving the Chorus emotionally in the shift in power between Pentheus and Dionysus. In addition, during rehearsals, Dr. Phaneuf pointed out an inherent flaw in the text, which the director must struggle to address: Dionysus is so clearly in control of the world and the situation, Pentheus never really has a chance to resist. While imbedded in the writing of Euripides, it would be exciting

to work toward a more even power struggle. Ideas to explore include: having the Chorus also serve as guards for Pentheus, to expand the numbers of his influence and even embody the struggle between forces as they fight against "themselves"; having the guards serve as ushers before the performance, creating a strict, militarized environment controlled by Pentheus and demonstrating his authority; beginning the performance with some sort of military display with the chorus marching in formation, reminiscent of Nazi Germany propaganda, where an audience would almost want to take part and might be haunted by that knowledge later.

My actors embodied this struggle, for I had worked with Vincent Carlson before and it was very easy for him to dominate the proceedings, especially with the way the script was written. Kevin Bensley was very good as Pentheus, but we had less experience with each other and I did not feel I could communicate with him as well as I do now. I also wonder how the production would have been different if Kevin and Vince had been reversed in their roles, whether perhaps it would have made Pentheus and Dionysus more balanced in their influence on the proceedings.

As for my women, I was very pleased with Deb Radloff's performance as Agave. She gave the role a weight and a maturity it required and her lamentation over her dead son was breathtaking and heartbreaking to watch. Similarly, Sarah Brown's performance as the Chorus Leader brought something

very special to the evening, allowing humor to appear at moments that were not apparent in the script and also embodying the passion and drive for the Chorus to celebrate Dionysus.

While I was very happy with the actors chosen, if faced with another classical piece, I would approach the use of the chorus differently. Though C.K. Williams has a point about dividing the lines between actors for clarity and vocal power, my divisions into smaller groups was somewhat arbitrary. Vocal qualities like pitch, timbre and volume should be given more consideration. My divisions were attempts at distributing the experienced with less experienced actors, resulting in uneven vocal balances, with some groups being more powerful while others lacked variety in their pitch and clarity. Exercises can assist in alleviating these concerns, but more care should be taken in casting each subgroup.

For the audience, there seemed to be a disconnect between the dialogue of the more narrative scenes and the choral odes. Watching audience reactions, they seemed to be listening attentively, but with movement and costumes and constantly shifting lights, I believe (and the student critiques verified) some became disoriented and shut down, rather than allowing the performance to wash over them. The lighting was beautiful and stimulating, but perhaps it should have been simpler, to distract less from the spoken word. Given the density of the choral odes, they seem to demand two extremes: greater clarity

or greater distance. Steps toward greater clarity would include adapting the text to a simpler, more repetitive text geared to 21st century ears. While I began adapting the script for this production, time escaped me and made that choice inadvisable. Looking at it now, the writing I completed has an energy and humor that makes the story more involving for a contemporary audience. Another notion would be adapting the text into song lyrics and setting them to music, as Lee Breuer did with *The Gospel at Colonus*. The realm of music theatre reduces the expectation of reality and might have justified the strangeness to the audience.

Creating greater distance for the choral sections might be achieved by heightening their remove from audience experience. One tactic would be to leave the choral odes in classical Greek and teach it to the actors phonetically. It would require additional rehearsal time and the meaning would have to be imparted to the chorus. This would force the actors to convey the information through emotion, vocal quality and gesture, while allowing the audience to absorb it as performance. This has been tried before, for when Anne Bogart directed Massenet's *Cendrillon*, the songs were sung in French while the dialogue was English.

Similarly, I was struck by the passion and physical drama of the women who provided sign language interpretation to the Wednesday performance, and

am excited at the opportunities that would provide for an entire production, with everyone (or at least the chorus) signing. Using American Sign Language for the chorus seems a viable option for coordinating music, movement and dance. Perhaps only the Chorus Leader would speak, as everyone else signed. It would best serve a text where the chorus is relatively stationary, perhaps *The Trojan Women.* Training an entire chorus to do this would require extensive rehearsal time, but the rewards of strong, beautiful movement communicating to a traditionally marginalized portion of the audience seems worthwhile, and the hearing audience would have less concern for understanding every word. To continue this notion further, it could prove dramatic (and less intensive) to illustrate the choral odes strictly through dance, which might be especially effective in a theatre program attached to a dance department.

Ultimately, the influence of Doris Humphrey was less her choreographic style and more her Check List (see appendix for full version). In the penultimate chapter of *The Art of Making Dances*, she presents ideas vital for staging any performance,. Her Check List might even be seen as Apollonian approach to seeking out the Dionysian in art—rational ways to access excitement and the irrational. The graduate thesis project also strives for a balance between the Apollonian—the logical, rational, academic, orderly theories and facts resisting the Dionysian—the instinctual, irrational, creative random experiments and notions. Yet as Humphrey knew, the struggle between these two extremes is

where dance or drama lives. Hunches and instinct are explained and codified over time and become theories and techniques. Logical approaches are compressed by time constraints and accidents of rehearsal and become spontaneous, creative discoveries. At a certain point, the theoretical is absorbed and becomes second nature. The Graduate Thesis Project is a wonderful and ghastly scenario, frantic, fast-paced and Dionysian, difficult to keep rational and well ordered.

Part of the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of dismemberment includes the notion of lost virility as part of a group, privileging the group over the individual. If a Poststructuralist reading inverts and discards that binary pairing, then members of the production team operating individually becomes as important as working together. Following a structure often used in musical theatre, I broke rehearsals into smaller groups, allowing other members of production team (all undergraduates) to supervise their portion and often choose their tactics. While I always gave them a task to complete, I allowed them to use their own judgment to achieve the task at hand. Rather than the cliché of too many cooks spoiling anything, if often led to a richer concoction than I had imagined. While I reserved the right to edit their work, more often it was a matter of adjusting what they had done, often encouraging them to take it farther. Given the choice, I would use this structure of rehearsals and responsibility again.

Staging the moments of offstage action on the balcony, especially the (dis)memberment of Pentheus, seemed an appropriate choice for this production and theatre space. Looking toward a future production of *The Bakkhai*, it might prove effective to stage the (dis)memberment (and the other moments) more directly onstage, especially as they are so central to the plot. That is how it was done in the Tadashi Suzuki production of *Dionysus* I saw at the University of Iowa, and the stylized action was very effective when done so visibly. In that production, the actor playing Pentheus stayed on the stage until the end. I would explore the option, but also am intrigued with Agave and Kadmus reassembling the body, covering it with the veil, and then using stage "magic" (i.e. a trap door), having Dionysus throw back the cloth, appearing from underneath

Regarding ritual (dis)memberment and musical theatre, I would like to explore the similarities between the Corn God ritual and the model of musical theatre librettos I discussed in Chapter Three further. I believe other musicals will prove to fit in this model, including *The Sound of Music*, *Crazy for You* and possibly *The Pajama Game*. Even the recent Elvis Presley musical *All Shook Up* concerns a stranger who comes to a town and transforms it with music. Clearly, this is a structure that works for musical theatre and a lengthier assessment of how each works or fails could prove to be an interesting article or even a dissertation. Moreover, the notion of ritual (dis)memberment could, I believe,

be embodied more for the audience, perhaps by showing the fragmentation of the text onstage, with the actors stopping and looking confused when they reach the gaps in the text, possibly even picking up several books or scrolls, seeking to find an appropriate text to fill in for what is missing. I would like to explore the notion of *sparagmos* in other Greek tragedies and would certainly like to direct *The Bakkhai* again someday.

It has been three years since I directed *The Bakkhai*. While the original proposal called for a finished thesis by April of 2003, coursework, comprehensive exams, job-hunting and full-time work intervened. Having completed these tasks and my Graduate Assistantship, I was quickly offered three directing projects back to back, which delayed completion of the thesis itself. While my intention was to finish sooner, time and necessity have provided opportunities to direct *Once Upon A Mattress, Pageant, Stop the World, I Want to Get Off, The Rimers of Eldritch* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor® Dreamcoat*. Each production has allowed me to explore the approaches I used on *The Bakkhai* in new ways and with different actors. I look forward to staging another classical play in the future, but would also like to use those techniques on a newer piece with choral elements like T. S. Elliott's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Euripides' *The Bakkhai* relates heavily to the ancient origins of theatre, and by directing it, I have learned much about the many centuries of theatre since.

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APPENDIXES

Auditions and Rehearsal

Callback Composition Exercise

Callback Composition Text

Doris Humphrey's Check List from *The Art of Making Dances*

Press

Preview Article: *The Reader*

Production Review: *The Daily Nonpareil*

Production Program

Production Photographs

Image 1: Semele's Tomb

Image 2: Kevin Bensley (Pentheus) and Vincent Carlson (Dionysus) seen from the entrance to Pentheus' palace.

Image 3: The overhead carcass of the snake Orphis.

Image 4: The palace of Pentheus.

Image 5: Kevin Bensley (Pentheus) and Vincent Carlson (Dionysus) just before their visit to the mountains.

Image 6: Vincent Carlson (Dionysus) and the Chorus.

Image 7: The overhead carcass of the snake Orphis.

Image 8: Vincent Carlson (Dionysus) enters from the balcony.

Image 9: The overhead carcass of the snake Orphis.

Image 10: The Chorus in the Balcony.

BAKKHAI CALLBACK COMPOSITION

You will be divided into groups. Put together a five minute movement piece, choosing the perfect spot in the theatre to perform it. Utilize extremes in tempo and proximity. There should be a clear beginning, middle and end. Your piece **must** include:

- At least fifteen seconds of simultaneous unison action
- One moment where everyone wears the same "mask"
- One moment where someone/something is dismembered
- One moment where someone/something is put back together
- One section that is lyrical and flowing
- One section that is structured and militaristic
- One moment from *Footloose* or *The Music Man*
- A section of choral speaking taken from anything on the second page ("Once a Year Day.") You can make any sounds you want, but this is the only text you can use.

You have fifteen minutes. GO!

Once-A-Year-Day

This is my once-a-year-day,
Once-a-year day,
Everyone's entitled to be wild,
Be a child, be a goof, raise the roof
Once a year!

This is our once-a-year day,
Once-a-year day,
Once a year we're jumpin' fences,
This is our once-a-year day,
Once-a-year day,
Once a year we lose our senses,

Look at Charlie up a tree
Kissin' Katie's ear,
Charlies' wife is mad as hell!

Ah well, it happens once a year.
And this is that once-a-year day,
Once-a-year day,
Everyone's entitled to be wild,
Be a child, be a goof, raise the roof
Once a year!

(Ross 72)

Doris Humphrey's Check List from *The Art of Making Dances*

Symmetry is lifeless

Two-dimensional design is lifeless

The eye is faster than the ear

Movement looks slower and weaker on the stage

All dances are too long

A good ending is forty per cent of the dance

Monotony is fatal; look for contrasts

Don't be a slave to, or a mutilator of, the music

Listen to qualified advice; don't be arrogant

Don't intellectualize; motivate movement

Don't leave the ending to the end

(Humphrey 159)

Tragically Hip

THE BAKKHAI
THIS WEEKEND

UNO graduate theater student Ron Zank directs the Greek tragedy *The Bakkhai* this weekend and next at the UNO Weber Fine Arts Building. One of the last great plays by Euripides, *The Bakkhai* explores the conflict between passion and reason. The Greek god Dionysus, or Bacchus, lures women to a mountaintop in Thebes, persuading them to follow him in a new religion, thus upsetting the society of Thebes. Much punishment ensues. The UNO production features a large ensemble cast and the use of fervent drumming to heighten the drama. Call 554-2335 for tickets. — *Leslie Prisbell*

Strange 'Bakkhai' creates some powerful atmospheric effects

WARREN FRANCKE, For the Nonpareil 03/06/2003

Submitted photo - Vince Carlson (above) and Kevin Bensley don outrageous costumes in the University of Nebraska at Omaha's version of ÒBakkhai of Euripides.Ó

They're doing this sexy, violent musical at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The dancing girls do a lot of writhing and heavy breathing when they're not beheading Greeks or tearing them limb from limb.

The program calls it "The Bakkhai of Euripides" as translated by C.K. Williams. But it needs a better title, like "Don't Mess With Dionysus," and maybe some nudity. It wouldn't do to have all the Bakkhai running around naked, just a glimpse of Bacchanalian debauchery here and there.

As is, we settle for a bare shoulder and a little leg from Sarah Brown, the comely and graceful leader of the chorus. If you go for blonds, long curls dangle from men - both the proud Pentheus and his disembodied head, and Dionysus himself. Whoops! Did someone call the Big D a man? He keeps reminding us he's "a God, Dionysus, Bacchus, the son of Zeus."

OK, it's not quite this wild. For most of the first act, it was all Greek to me. But the Bakkhai do some bumping, grinding and moaning, and director Ron Zant deserves an audience for his in-the-round interpretation of the ancients.

Grad students get to do their thing, and he creates great atmospherics with the help especially of sound designer Vincent Carlson, who digs the beat of his own drummers as Dionysus. Scenic designer Todd Edwards created a powerful piece of decor, a skeletal, rag-draped snake that curls overhead. But choral movement coordinated by Deborah Radloff and omnipresent sound gave the performance its most distinctive qualities.

And the spoken word was its biggest drawback. Four horned satyrs drummed on the catwalk above, often clouding the choral exposition, which also suffered from over-lapping voices.

Dialogue doesn't dominate, but was clear enough when actors weren't facing in other directions. What wasn't clear at all was the concept behind accompanying movement by individuals.

For example, Nick Zadina's entrance as the elderly Tierosias provided the first well-articulated speeches early in the play, but then we're wondering why he's doing comic footwork. Cute, but distracting.

And what was Grandpa Cadmus (Nick Mazzuca) doing with the funny phrasing and the odd costume? Kevin Bensley's Pentheus was an impressive presence, but what were those boxy hand gestures?

Amidst all the awesome atmospherics appears a shrine cordoned off with yellow crime scene tape. Ready to flee at intermission, the reviewer consulted with two gray eminences who've attended hundreds of plays over the last half century. The three of us agreed that, yes, that was yellow crime scene tape, and that its anachronistic meaning was quite apparent. To the director at least.

But, since Dionysus had not said, "Sock it to me, baby," we stuck it out

Fortunately, the second act seemed to make more sense. Reports of more sex and violence by the

Bakkhai sounded promising, and then we got Pentheus in drag.

Add the reassembling of his body parts by his mother and who could ask for anything more? The Bakkhai singing, "I've got rhythm?"

Much commendable work by those named above plus some fine staff-banging by the guards, Konrad Case and Ken Porter ... stop. Like much of the play, that requires some translation. Make that pounding their spears on the stage, not staff-banging.

Radloff has done many outstanding roles at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, but here she delivers that immortal line, "I'm holding my son's head." We've all done that, but usually with body attached.

Seriously, we're indebted to Zant for tackling this classic, and it does create some powerful atmospheric sound and visual impact. The chorus, from Brown to the willowy Wai Yim, was fascinating at times, if not always understood. And the point was clear: Don't mess with Dionysus. It continues through March 8 on the UNO campus

Post your opinion and share your thoughts with other readers!

Name:Kathleen Bagby Coate **Date:Mar, 06 2003**

I'm assuming that the writer of this story was commending the show, however it was hard to tell with his incoherent questions and sophomoric-phrases like "what was with the boxy hand gestures?" It sure would be nice if writers who reviewed theatre actually knew anything about it, like the traditional styles of ancient greek rituals, chorus presentation, and stylized acting. I thought the show was phenomenal, as it embraced the ritualistic conventions of ancient Greek theatre with modern realism and contemporary movement. Kudos to the UNO cast.

Number of Opinions:1

Back to top

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University of Nebraska at Omaha
Department of Theatre
with permission from C.K. Williams
presents

The Bakkhai

of Euripides

translation by C.K. Williams

Director
Ron Zank

In partial completion of requirements for the Master of Arts in Theatre

Assistant Director
Bethany Felts

Stage Manager
Suzanne Withem

Lighting Design
Steven L. Williams

Scenic Design
Todd F. Edwards

Properties Design
Travis Halsey

Sound Design
Vincent Carlson

Costume Design
Sharon Sobel*

Movement Coordinator
Deborah Radloff

*Member, United Scenic Artists of America-Local 829

UNO Department of Theatre Adjunct Faculty
Kenny Glenn
Mark Hoeger
Michael Markey
Charleen JB Willoughby

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHORUS LEADER.....Sarah Brown

CHORUS OF BAKKHAI
Jen Agnew, Rebekah Johnson, Elnora Ford,
Melanie Gillis, Erin Bragg, Cassi Nespor,
Chad Svagera, Wai Yim

SATYR PERCUSSION CHORUS

HOARY SATYR.....Aaron Michael Gomez

BEARDED SATYR.....Jon Merchen

BEARDLESS SATYR.....Greg Place

GRANDFATHER SILENUS.....Steve Krambeck

GUARD.....Konrad Case

GUARD.....Ken Porter

KADMUS.....Nick Mazzuca

TIERESIAS.....Nick Zadina

HERDSMAN.....Adam Scarpello

DIONYSUS.....Vincent Carlson

PENTHEUS.....Kevin Bensley

AGAVE.....Deborah Radloff

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

What you will see on this stage today is not merely a performance. It is a ritual, a "passion play," an enactment of one of the oldest stories in Western literature, and what's more, a story that keeps being adapted and re-enacted.

At the same time, while Classical Greek drama served many civic and educational functions, it also served as entertainment for the tired Athenian citizen. I believe much of the appeal in these scripts is tied to our cultural love affair with musical theatre. No, people don't burst into song in everyday life, but neither do Greek gods come to earth. If you're looking for realism, you've come to the wrong place.

Part of the beauty of ancient texts is that they still resonate in our lives, while providing the opportunity to be re-imagined for and by each audience that experiences them. The Bakkhai is not merely my thesis project. It is the summation of my learning and collaboration with this department for the last two years.

Thanks to the faculty, staff, and my thesis committee that made this project possible. Additional praise to the students both onstage and backstage who were willing to play "What if…?" And none of this would have been possible without, Suzanne, for keeping me in check, Bethany, for talking me down from rooftops, Deb, for helping me bring back the spirits of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman, Sarah, for riding herd on the chorus, and Vincent, our indispensable "Minister of Rhythm."

Let the drumming begin . . .

Ron Zank

C. K. Williams

C. K. Williams was born in 1936 in Newark, New Jersey. He is the author of numerous books of poetry, including *Repair* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize; *The Vigil* (1997); *A Dream of Mind* (1992); *Flesh and Blood* (1987), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Tar* (1983); *With Ignorance* (1997); *I Am the Bitter Name* (1992); and *Lies* (1969). Williams has also published five works of translation: *Selected Poems of Francis Ponge* (1994); *Canvas*, by Adam Zagajewski (with Renata Gorczynski and Benjamin Ivry, 1991); *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990); *The Lark. The Thrush. The Starling.* (Poems from Issa) (1983); and *Women of Trachis*, by Sophocles (with Gregory Dickerson, 1978). Among his many awards and honors are an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry, Pushcart Prize and a Pulitzer Prize. Williams teaches in the creative writing program at Princeton University and lives part of each year in Paris.

from Their Eyes Were Watching God

by Zora Neale Hurston

All gods who receive homage are cruel.
All gods dispense suffering without reason.
Otherwise they would not be worshipped.
Through indiscriminate suffering men know fear and fear
is the most divine emotion.
It is the stones for altars and the beginning of wisdom.
Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers.
Real gods require blood.

TECHNICAL STAFF

Graduate Stage Manager.....Ron Zank
Assistant Stage Managers.....Anne Marie Lubbers, Kyle Muhle
Assistant Lighting Designer.....Toby R. Gibson
Assistant Sound Designer.....Adam Scarpello
Assistant Costume Designer.....Amie James
Sign Language Interpreters.....Jamy Elker, Carly Flagg-Campbell

Cutter and Draper.....Charleen JB Willoughby
Graduate Costumer.....Francene Blythe
Draper/CostumeCraftsman.....Travis Halsey
Costume Construction.....Deborah Radloff, Amy Bertacini, Megan White, Melissa Harvey, Nozomi Sagihara
Makeup Coordinator.....Stephen Lahowetz
Wardrobe Head.....Stephanie Kidd-Dorwart
Wardrobe Crew.....Katie Breen, Jillian Cutshall

Technical Director.....Todd F. Edwards
Associate Technical Director.....Sean Licari
Scenic Charge Artists.....Kim Bagby and Kim Rutledge
Set Construction.....John Grüber, Brianne Kemp, Adam Nelson, Kim Rutledge, Stagecraft Class
Set Run Coordinator.....Jon Shaw

Property Construction Crew.....Steve Krambeck
Property Shop Manager.....Molly Welsh
Property Run Crew Head.....Anne Marie Lubbers
Property Run Crew.....Andrew McGreevy
Master Electricians.....Toby R. Gibson, Amy Bertacini
Light Hang Crew.....Stage and TV Lighting Class
Light Board Operator.....Kelli Hahn
Sound Board Operator.....Jennifer Bruce

Graduate Asst. Publicity & Marketing.....Laura Kendall
Publicity Crew Head.....Nick Mazzuca
House Manager.....Travis Halsey
Ushers.....Toby R. Gibson, Matt Gorgen, Adam Nelson
Box Office Manager.....Mishia Edwards
Box Office/Publicity.....Laura Kendall, Dena M. Hite, Angie O. Moy Amanda Liebhart, Melissa Carnahan, Stephanie Weller
Poster Design.....Steven L. Williams
Program Content.....Dena M. Hite

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Dr. Jeanne Reames-Zimmerman
Sonia Keffer
David Johnson

Ron Zank Graduate Committee Members:
Susann Suprenant, Chair
Cindy Melby Phaneuf
Josie Metal-Corbin

CURTAIN TALK

An interactive question, answer and discussion session with the director, designers and cast. Curtain Talk is intended to create an informal atmosphere where theatre patrons are invited to stay after the performance and visit with the production team.

The Bakkhai	Mar 7
Blithe Spirit	Apr 25

Immediately following the performance